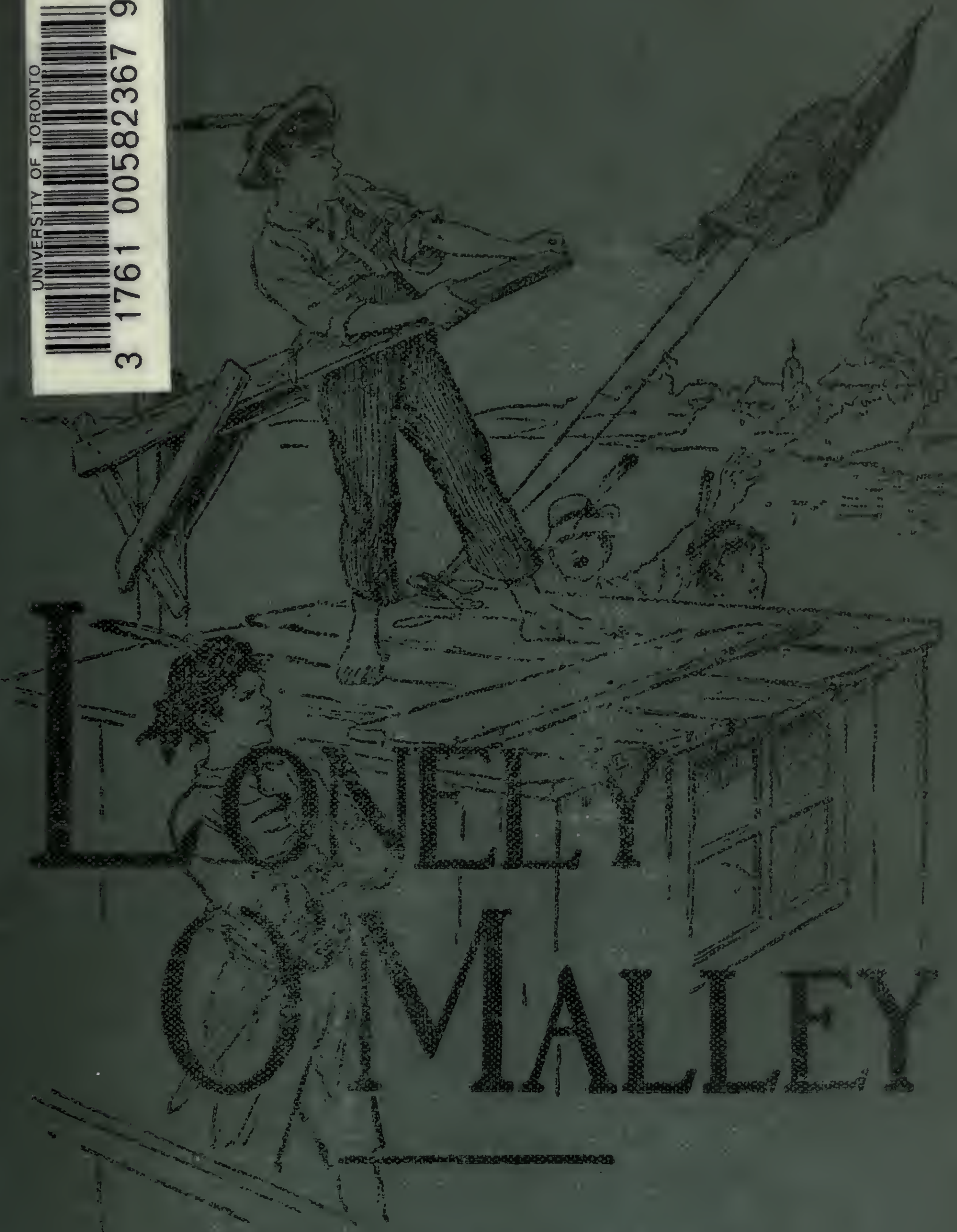


LONELY O'MALLEY

ARTHUR STRINGER

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WELL, SIRS, WHAT WILL YOU

LONELY O'MALLEY

A Story of Boy Life

BY

ARTHUR STRINGER

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
FRANK T. MERRILL



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1905

Published September 1905

To Dorothy Violet Wilde

All youth, my dearest Dorothy Violet, is divided into three parts, — that earliest blindfold age of infancy, that more wonderful mud-pie age of divers savageries and many imaginings, that still more golden and wonderful age of adolescence. Then, alas, the prison-house of actualities seems to close about us, and we awaken some fine morning to the sad fact that we are, thereafter, to be regarded as only one of the grown-ups. Of this dolorous condition you still know nothing; but when it does come, you will find your three ages of youth each merging into the other, and all grown misty. Of the first, of course, we can recall nothing. The second, alackaday, we all too quickly forget. The third, with its dreams and illusions, we carry along with us only in echoes and broken memories. So, this milestone or two on the long and devious wayside of a small boy's career may, I hope, keep alive in your heart and mine, and perhaps in a few others', some remembrances of those earlier days of life that too soon slip away — of those days when I thought you the nicest little girl in all the world, and you (dare I say it?) openly avowed that lemon meringue was the summum bonum *of all existence!*

A. S.

12 Piazza Barberini, Rome, April, 1905

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CHAPTER I

In which Lonely finds himself an Outlander

THE sun mounted higher in the turquoise sky. The birds sang more sleepily. Faint and far away, from the flats down by the river, a few belated frogs still trebled and fluted. Then, lazily, the warm breeze stirred, and died away, and stirred again, scattering a drifting shower of cherry-blossoms through the heavy, indolent sunlight, murmurous with the hum and drone of many wings, where, for the hundredth time, a song-sparrow preached his vagabond philosophy of "*Sweet! Sweet! Idleness — Idleness — Idleness!*"

It was a cloudless Saturday morning, and the end of May. There was something more than the smell of buds and young leaves in the air, something more than the sound of frogs and sparrows and bobolinks, — for when Piggie Brennan, the butcher's son, had deliv-

ered his roast of beef at Widow Tiffin's back door, he drew a generous slice of bologna from his trousers pocket, wiped it deliberately on his sleeve, and then wagged his head twice, solemnly, and with much conviction. This done, he poked his empty basket well in under Barrison's stable, and whistled three times, softly, for Redney McWilliams.

Redney, under stern inspection from the back kitchen window, was engaged in a deal of puffing and blowing and wheezing, as he intermittently wielded a buck-saw on a stick of elm cordwood, for some twenty languid strokes, and then, for an equal length of time, gazed vacuously and dreamily at his feet, "to spell his muscles," he had explained to the uncomprehending parental mind, preoccupied with stewing rhubarb in the back kitchen.

"S-s-stt! s-s-stt there, Redney!"

Then there came a discreet pause.

"Redney! Hi, there, Redney!"

The boy at the buck-saw, as he heard that husky whisper from the knot-hole in the back fence, slowly and cautiously turned his head, without in the least moving his labor-bent body.

"*She's watchin'!*" he ejaculated, under his breath. Then there was another discreet pause.

"C'm' on fishin'!" whispered the husky voice, at last, through the knot-hole.



THE BOY AT THE BUCK-SAW

Redney cast a furtive glance toward the kitchen window. Then, whistling artlessly, he strode with great deliberation to the very wood-shed door, to reconnoiter. Still whistling, he

mounted the wood-pile. There he made a great pretense of throwing down fresh fuel for his energy. When he heard a stove-door slam shut he knew that his moment had come, and stepped quickly from the wood-pile to the neighboring fence-top, and then dropped quietly into the back alley.

Once he had thus crossed his Rubicon, his entire manner took on a sudden transformation, and at Piggie Brennan's repeated declaration that it ought to be mighty fine fishing weather again, he gave vent to a vigorous and abandoned can-can, quite belying the exhausted muscles of the buck-saw laborer.

Two lots further down the alley they discovered Billie Steiner blithely raking up the back yard, wrapt in the happiness of innocent content. They peered in at him, over the fence-top, silently, and with impassive faces. But the tongue of Billie, the unconscious artist, was out, and it worked contemplatively back and forth with every stroke of his rake. An audible snicker broke from the two boys, as they dropped down out of sight.

"Say, Billie, c'm' on fishin'!"

"Heh!" said the startled husbandman.

"Aw, c'm' on fishin', Billie!"

At the magic of that mysterious call, floating in on his honest labor, all the world seemed to change. The boards about Billie Steiner became a prison wall; the heavy rake fell from his listless hand. The seed of revolt sank deep in his breast. He scuttled secretively down toward the back fence. There he held converse with certain unseen conspirators, through a narrow crack between the imprisoning boards.

A moment later he had scaled his audacious way out to liberty. In the freedom of the alley, on the sunny side of the Steiner chicken-coop, the three boys talked things over, Piggie producing matches and Redney McWilliams a supply of punk and dried spatter-dock stems. A happy and pensive silence fell over the little group as they lit up. There was no hurry; the whole day was before them; and it was not until their three throats were dry and their three tongues well blistered that they felt they had had their fill of the weed, and decided to move on.

Pud Jones was moodily receiving his first lesson in garden-making, under the wing of

his rheumatic, care-taking, and yet somewhat short-tempered old grandfather, when a tiny pebble hit him on the bridge of the nose.



PUD JONES WAS MOODILY RECEIVING HIS FIRST LESSON IN GARDEN-MAKING

He started violently, and looked cautiously at the fence in the rear. But he said nothing.

Still another pebble hit him, a weightier one,

this time on the calf of the leg. He jumped therefore unexpectedly, and rubbed the spot briskly.

"Sufferin' sassafras, Kilvert Jones! Can't you stand stiddy a minute? First thing you know you 'll be havin' St. Vitus Dance!" complained the old gardener, already exasperated by his young ward's eloquent argument that garden-digging was a ruthless destruction of innocent worm-life, a destruction so horrible to his stern young sense of mercy, he had intimated, that it promised to take the heart out of his day's work.

Pud's backward glance toward the fence held a touch of vindictiveness. His unsuspecting tutor turned away, mumblingly, for the spade that leaned against the grape-arbor. When he hobbled back to the little garden-plot his young grandson had disappeared, as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed him.

"Why, — why, bless my soul, he 's — he 's gone!" ejaculated the old gentleman, weakly, rubbing his chin. And with his hand to his eyes he peered dazedly about.

If the hearing of Pud's grandfather had been

the least bit sharper, that bewildered old gardener might have caught the excited murmur of happy young voices drifting off down the alley, and the mystic whistled call which echoed softly out from behind Johnson's barn, where Dode Johnson rebelliously and languidly gathered chips, in an old market-basket, and made patient and needlessly exhaustive observations on the traveling powers of a wood-slug.

"Hey-oh, there, Dode!" cried a muffled voice.

"Goin' fishin'?" demanded Dode, softly, without rising from his knees, as he caught sight of that telltale little band and sniffed at the penetrating yet mysteriously fragrant odor of burning punk and dock-stems.

"Sure!" said Piggie Brennan, turning over a board in search for worms. "Can't you make your sneak, Dode?"

Dode looked about him, guardedly. A moment later he emerged, puffing, dirt-covered, red-faced, worming his way out from under the driving-shed.

"I thought you had to clean them turnips up out o' your cellar?" he said to Redney McWilliams, as he lit up luxuriously.

"W'at turnips?" demanded Redney, vacuously.

"Why, them winter turnips you said 'd rotted down there!"

"Oh, who cares for turnips!" cried Redney, abandonedly. "This is fishin' weather!"

The sun mounted still higher, the frogs still



HE EMERGED FROM UNDER THE DRIVING-SHED

trebled and fluted down on the river-flats, the warm breeze stirred lazily once more. The alleys and back yards of the town of Chamboro grew quieter; the robins sang on undisturbed; the noisy rattle of an occasional pump-handle echoed through the blossom-muffled stillness. Even the wooden soldier windmill on the peak of Barrison's stable refused any longer to wheel and flaunt his faded red arms.

A capering, reckless, and emancipated band of ragged nomads crept and dodged stealthily out past old Captain Steiner's orchard, past the graveyard, and past Judge Eby's cow-pasture, to essay for "shiners" and "punkin-seeds," and to adventure with life among the rafts and odorous logs of the old river. For in an hour, almost, a new and all-conquering infection had swept through Chamboro. Few were to escape the disease, for once more the sleepy little river town was in the throes of spring-fever.

Piggie Brennan stooped down and tried the water that stood in a stagnant little pool just in front of Curry's greenhouse. He reported it, jubilantly, to be warmer than milk. Then Billie Steiner tried it, and remained discreetly silent, for, pending the drying of a belated washing, he had fallen back on a pair of his sister's stockings, with the too-voluminous tops carefully stretched and tucked up under his trouser-legs — and he did not care to have the fact known.

But others soon confirmed Piggie's verdict, and a sudden decisive "Gee, then, here goes!" from Pud Jones was followed by the

feverish ripping off of an all too-confining boot.

In three minutes every member of that band of adventurers sat at the roadside, barefooted, wriggling toes, and half dreamily contemplating thin young legs, as bleached and white as grass that had grown up under a board. But a month of fishing-weather, they knew, and the right butternut-brown would be there again, and there would be no more need of gingerly picking one's way across stubble and gravel-patches!

From this mysterious rite of denudation, indeed, a sort of Dionysian madness seemed to ensue. The band went mad of a sudden; one and all they capered, galloped, yelled, curveted, with every sound and movement of ecstasy, plunging and splashing through ditches, puddling in mud-pools, skimming over velvety young grass-plots. Then the shoes and stockings were hidden, in a sadly mixed-up heap, under Smith's cow-stable, and the band took up its way toward the river. It was fishing-weather once more!

Long before they reached his street, the new boy had caught the sound of their shrill-

noted merriment. With an animal-like instinct common to his kind, he had guessed and understood everything. They were going fishing!

He wondered, in a foolish little flutter of hope, if they would call companionably in as they passed, just hollering off-hand over the fence for him to get a move on, and come along if he wanted to!

Then the new boy remembered the events of the day before, and the hope died down. Certain disturbing signs had already been driven home to him. He was an outlander, an intruder, with his right still unestablished. And besides all that, things were not going to come out right, bitterly maintained Lonely O'Malley. Nothing good ever came of getting at a place on *Friday* — there was trouble ahead, of some kind. And twice on the way, too, he had seen a black cat, plain as day, on his path.

For Lonely O'Malley was indeed a new boy in Chamboro. From the sandy little neighboring hills, the afternoon before, he had caught a disconsolate sight of the sleepy old town, basking like a gray kitten in the sun,

under a sky far more cloudless than Lonely's unhappy soul.

It was, to him, neither a moving nor an inviting sight, that first glimpse of his new home; for like many another strange town, Chamboro lay sprawling brokenly along the valley of a strange river which twined and curled and wound slumbrously down through a dark and alien country, wooded with maple and willow and sycamore. Through the limpid valley quietness of the May afternoon rose the puffing and churning of a river-tug or two, the rhythmical cling-clang of the blacksmith's anvil, the periodic hum and whine and scream of the sawmill. But the hills here seemed to stretch before him not half so green as the older and fairer hills of remembrance. The water here seemed not half so silvery as was the river at Cowansburg. The bobolinks and bluebirds could not sing so well, the very cherry-blossoms did not smell so good. To this bald new country, indeed, clung none of that golden enchantment which haloed the new boy's lost home, now forty long miles behind him. And Lonely felt so bad about it all that he wondered whether or not he was

drawing near to an untimely death, — and to be on the safe side, secretly made his will, up in the hay-loft, and duly signed it in his own blood.

The migration from Cowansburg had not been of a kind to suit Lonely's spirit. It had been effected slowly, placidly, and laboriously, by means of a venerable old wagon from which two hub-bands and five wheel spokes were conspicuously absent, together with a raw-boned, long-haired, and ineffably meek-spirited steed of gigantic proportions, answering to the name of Plato.

Tied to the tail-board of the wagon with a piece of clothes-line, had followed Lonely's faithful goat, Gilead, — a stubbornly home-loving creature, who, on different occasions, had been duly sold or traded to nineteen youths of Cowansburg, only at the first opportunity to return to his original owner, with a blind and indomitable instinct that was as profitable as it was touching.

Lonely, for this overland journey through a new and unknown country, had armed himself with great care and forethought. A kitchen knife had been secretly pointed and

sharpened, even a hickory bow and arrow had been strapped on the wagon's back axle. His calico waist had also bulged out on the one side with a long-used and well-tried sling-shot, on the other with a goodly stock of leaden pellets, made by means of a rusty old bullet-mould, hired from a comrade spirit for the occasion.



ARMED HIMSELF WITH GREAT CARE

But neither buffalo nor Indian had crossed Lonely's path. Not a wild animal had molested them; not even a road-agent had interrupted their journey, nor a highwayman prowled about their camp!

To Lonely it had seemed very slow traveling. For on his broken-springed and sadly overloaded wagon the adventurous Timothy O'Malley, lately returned from the gold-fields of the Klondike, carried not only all his goods and chattels, but also his own inebriate self and his pensive-browed, hollow-cheeked wife, to say nothing of a lusty-throated infant daugh-

ter, named Alaska Alice, — so christened in honor of the sturdy mustang which had once dragged the wandering gold-seeker over White Pass and delivered him for the last time from the hardships of a most inglorious and unremunerative vagabondage. Learning of an opening in Chamboro, Timothy O'Malley was turning from the glories of the Open Trail to his humble but honest old trade of bread-making.

There had been a great deal of talk, in Chamboro, of the affluent young Klondiker who was to take up his residence in that busy and progressive town. Much speculation was indulged in as to whether the newcomer would enter into the banking business, conduct some sort of brokerage concern, or live in quiet luxury on the harvests of his northern adventures.

When, accordingly, the O'Malley equipage, after a humble but happy enough all-night camp on the roadside trail, appeared unexpectedly on the outskirts of the town, there was a sudden great to-do in the streets of Chamboro. As Plato, with his languid yet majestic stride, slowly hauled the strange load into the little town, lending to the invasion

the solemnity of a catafalque, there was much barking of dogs, and bobbing of heads from open windows, and crowding of doorways, and calling over back-yard fences.



NOW, WHAT STRANGE CRAFT MIGHT THAT BE ?

As for the dogs, Lonely's sling-shot mysteriously though effectively attended to them, desperately engaged as he was in holding upon

the top of the load six lengths of stovepipe and an ever-sliding mattress. The resentment of Lonely's father was more open, for in the very main street of all Chamboro he publicly flung two empty whiskey-bottles at the Barrison's bull-pup — a fact which was duly noted, remembered, and commented on.

"Now, what strange craft might that be?" querulously demanded old Cap'n Sands, of old Cap'n Steiner, as the two bent figures leaned on their sticks and watched her float majestically into port.

Yet so remarkably did the O'Malley conveyance resemble a gypsy camp in transit that many of the smaller children fled incontinently, while the fat old town constable guardedly followed the strange vehicle to its destination. And when it was discovered that the once myth-like and much-talked-of Argonaut of the Frozen North was to occupy the humble little house and bake-shop of the late Widow Elkins, and that he had boasted of being able to mix, mould, and bake six hundred loaves a night, the town of Chamboro felt that it had been cheated out of some glory, vaguely denominated, it is true, but still a glory. Nor

had the first impression of the O'Malley family been changed by the discovery that, pending the re-shingling of their house, they were camping out in the front yard, cheerfully and contentedly, under the smoke-stained canvas of the very tent which had once stood amid the subarctic snows of Twenty Mile Creek.

All this Lonely had seen and resented. So as he caught sight of the barefooted, reckless band, that bright Saturday morning, and heard their telltale whistles and shouts and cat-calls, he had a little battle of his own to fight out. He wondered, in a moment of weakness, if it would not be better to hide Alaska Alice. He remembered the odium attaching to the boy who openly "minded the baby." An avocation so servile and effeminate branded one, he was fully aware, as with the brand of Cain. Yet he took his own joy, he knew, in the company of Alaska Alice. He even had a sneaking love for toting her about. And he was n't going back on her. Animal-like, he pugnaciously claimed the right to stand by his own.

He saw the band stop in front of the Preacher's house, and in buttery and gleeful

imitation of an over-affectionate mother's voice call out: "Lio-o-o-o-nel! Lio-o-o-o-nel Clarence!" and then inquire, mockingly, if Curly Locks wanted to come fishing.

At this Lonely remembered that the Preacher's son wore his hair in longish yellow-brown curls, and dressed, usually, in a black velvet suit, with ruffles, and a hopeless white collar.

So Lonely looked at Alaska Alice once more, half affectionately, half defiantly, and realized that his Waterloo was not far away. He made one desperate effort, while there was still time, to waken the grass-gorged and ruminant Plato from an attitude of hopeless and demeaning melancholy. This he tried to do by means of an adroitly flung pebble or two. Plato, however, instead of being stung out of his woe-begone abjection by these unjust missiles, merely whisked his thin tail languidly and stood on three legs, in meek and monumental pensiveness.

Then Lonely waited for the outcome.

"Git onto the bone-yard!" cried a voice from the advance guard of the approaching enemy. A moment later a stone or two fell about the old horse.

"An' look at Irish, mindin' the baby!" was the next derisive cry that smote on Lonely's tingling ears.

"Lambast the redhead!" suggested Pud Jones, genially.

Lonely caught up Alaska Alice and hunched her up firmly on his hip, his body between her and the assailers. His thin, hungry-looking



AUDACIOUS, JEERING, TYRANNICAL

face went very white, as the line of audacious, jeering, tyrannical, relentless young savages drew up and peered over the low picket fence.

He was, he knew, at least standing his ground with dignity. And all might still have

been well, had not Alaska Alice set up a sudden, energetic, and inopportune wail, which grew into a bawl, and from a bawl became a paroxysm.

A shout of derisive laughter swelled up from the street. A tomato can hit Lonely on the shin-bone, a pebble or two cut through the canvas of the little tent.

"Soak the gypsies!" cried Redney McWilliams, as he took one last sly fling at the meek-eyed Plato.

"Ain't this the Klondike millionaire's?" mocked another.

"Say, Sis, what y' doin' in boy's clothes?" demanded Piggie Brennan, sweetly, as he kicked the little front gate open.

Lonely winced at that stab, and took a dark and studious look at the offender. There, above all, he told himself, was an enemy he was to remember and an offense he was to wipe out!

The band drifted aimlessly on, and a minute later was cutting fishing-poles from the Gubtill's lilac-bushes. They had not even so much as offered to fight! They had not even sent forth the inevitable challenge to the New

Boy! And Lonely's last hope of companionship crumbled away.

The boy's mother, startled by the loud voices, came to the door, with a scrubbing-brush in her hand. She gazed down the street after the disappearing band.

"I guess I could keep an eye on Alaska Alice!" she hinted, as she caught the sound of the shrill, boyish voices, blown back to the doorway where she stood.

"Ain't I mindin' her?" demanded Lonely, moodily.

The woman gazed down at the solitary figure, and then out at the dusty road, studded with the prints of many bare feet. From somewhere in the distance a few hens clucked drowsily.

"Don't you want to go fishing?"

"Nope!" said the boy, as he hitched impatiently at his blue denim overalls.

"You — you don't want to go with those other boys?" she repeated, amazed.

He glanced down the dust-covered street, after the happy little band, and was silent. They were playing "Last-Tag" now, and he could hear the old refrain:

Nigger 's always last tag!
Fools always say so!
Up a tree and down a tree;
You 're the biggest fool I know!

"Go on, Lonely, and have a good time with the others!" said his mother, commiseratively, once more looking back at the desolate figure in the bald little sunlit yard.

Lonely gazed at Plato, flung a stone at the fence, and peered angrily out from under his sandy little eyebrow at his mother. She did not understand.

"Don't want to!"

"Go on, Lonely," she urged once more.

"I tell you I don't want to go fishin'!" he shrilled out testily. And then he spat hard, a couple of times, to get rid of the sudden lump in his throat.

His mother went back to her work. The sound of his father's hammer echoed more and more unevenly from the back roof — due to the fact that much stimulant had been called into service to brace the gold-miner's nerves against labor so dull and menial. The chorus of boy voices grew fainter and far away. They passed down through the watery Flats,

and out through the wooded gloom of the Upper River.

Only now and then Lonely could hear a low little burst of laughter and calling, a muffled shout or two. Through the clear, opalescent air he caught sight of the smoke from their bonfire. He watched it drift and fade and melt down the river valley. A dog barked in the distance, dismally. The sun mounted higher and higher in the cloudless sky.

"'Laska Alice, do you know what you've up and done?" sternly demanded Lonely.

The innocent young lady thus contemplatively addressed continued to clutch at a dandelion head with ineffectual fingers, bubbling and crooning with untimely joy.

"'Laska Alice," repeated the boy, meditatively, "I think you've been my finish, all right!"

And he looked down at her studiously, but with no resentment in his vacant eyes, as he remembered, half bitterly, that this was the town where he had dreamed that trumpeters in green tights like the trapeze performers at the circus, were to ride out and greet him, and for

a whole day the fountains were to run with wine, and the Princess was to beckon down to him from her Tower!

Even a good fight, he felt in that dark hour, would have made him seem more at home.

To Alicia — Ætat. 20

When you made custard tarts — of mud —
Which Tweedle vowed delicious —
And I with popguns sought the blood
Of Red-Men, huge and vicious —

That was our glad, mad, rainbow age,
Those days when we together
Climbed thro' the orchard wall to wage
Such wars — in lath and feather !

I sit and ponder sadly o'er
Each wound of poor old Tweedle —
Who shed her sawdust brave before
Her nurse could find a needle !

We stormed and took each orchard tree —
True, long the foe resisted ! —
Then gave each captive, for his tea,
Mud-pies, as you insisted !

But now, they say, your trousseau's made,
And you, poor child, will shortly
Be married to a person staid,
And rich, though somewhat portly !

Ah, me ! My youth, mud-pies, and You,
Are gone — gone past recover !
Yet, Dear, I'm still your old and true
And one unchanging lover !

CHAPTER II

In which the King is again disowned

"SONNY, have you lost a goat?"

"Mebbe!" answered Lonely, non-committally, eyeing the angular and angry-eyed woman in the pink sunbonnet.

"Well, that goat 's et up every blessed one of my black raspberry bushes!" declared the unknown woman, looking at Lonely as though she could willingly have done the same with him.

"That 's too bad!" said the new boy, blinking at the pink sunbonnet. His coolness had far from a pacifying effect.

"And that goat goes to pound, young man, till them bushes is paid for, and well paid for!" stormed the woman.

"All right!" said Lonely, moodily. He had other troubles to occupy his mind.

The pink sunbonnet disappeared. A few minutes later the sound of shrill screams rang through the quiet village street.

Lonely ventured tentatively forth, to take in the situation. Three gateways beyond his

own house he found the woman of the pink sunbonnet marooned on the box of her chain-pump, with Gilead keeping guard below, doggedly. He had been attacked with a kettleful of hot water; but the engagement had been a brief one.

It was only after exacting a promise that nothing more should be said of the black raspberry bushes, that Lonely dragged Gilead away; and, having made a bird-snare into which even the Chamboro sparrows resentfully declined to poke their heads, he once more loitered ill at ease about his own yard, a bitter and rebellious young Ishmaelite, seeing that Alaska Alice did not fall out of her cart, and making sure that the omnivorous Plato did not extend his browsing exercises to the family furniture. He was still brooding about the way in which he had been received in Chamboro, where not an advance had been made to him, and not a subject had paid fealty to him. And he could have told them more about shiners and mud-cat and sunfish than could all the village Solomons put together. He, the one-time boy king of Cowansburg, could have shown them how to

snare more bull-frogs than Chamboro ever dreamed of. He could have taught them more about bird-nesting, and more about



MAROONED ON THE TOP OF HER CHAIN-PUMP

twitch-ups and dead-falls and box-traps and fishing-otters, than could the oldest naturalist on the river.

And perhaps it would be as well to take

a second and longer look at Lonely O'Malley, as he prowls so moodily about between those imprisoning home fences.

Beyond a trick of nervously hunching up one shoulder, of wriggling his body when talking, and squinting at people, especially his elders, he is, after all, only a good deal of the every-day, ubiquitous, dream-weaving, nondescript and much misunderstood creature known as Boy. It was only in the merest accidentals, such as being powder-marked on the right cheek-bone, that he differed from others of his kind.

The first thing one would be sure to notice about Lonely was a nebulous cloud of freckles, as brown as the spots on a turkey egg, bridging his rather crooked little nose. His thin young face was always hungry-looking, wearing obviously the hunger of the soul and not that of the body, since Lonely, even after his seventh apple turn-over, still bore his wistful look of want. His hair was a dingy reddish-brown, thick and matted, sprouting waywardly up through the rents in his tattered old skull-cap, giving every evidence of that time-honored home-treatment, demanding only a bowl and

a pair of scissors — though later in the summer, it must be confessed, a friendly groom at the livery-stable put this crude method to shame by brief yet transforming applications of the horse-clippers.

From under Lonely's bushy little russet eyebrows looked out a pair of eyes which had no right to be there; for they were, in truth, the eyes of a woman, — unfathomable, lustrous, quick-changing, restlessly meditative eyes, — the sort of eyes, for all the nervous squint that often came into them, that made tender-hearted women vaguely wish, when they chanced to catch sight of Lonely in a moment of fleeting and innocent repose, that they might some day be his Sunday-school teacher and talk to him about his soul. They were eyes that made the hearts of more elderly maiden ladies, when not indignantly driving their predaceous owner out of a strawberry patch, wish just as incongruously that they could some day be a mother to Lonely, and at the same time speculate as to how nice he would be with a well-washed face, or in a clean and respectably starched roundabout.

If, alas! those undiscerning and deluded

ladies had let their gaze fall a little lower and studied Lonely's most significant and eloquent members, his sinewy and scrawny young legs, they might have hesitated for a moment or two. For those gently concave, bandy legs of Lonely's veritably seemed built for shinning up apple-trees, for scaling orchard fences, for worming under wood-sheds and careering through melon-patches, for that airy "frog-motion" which is the pride of all youthful swimmers, and, finally, for the general destruction of those garments which are the despair of all experienced mothers.

His gnarled and crooked little fingers, too, were equally expressive, cut and scarred and marked as they were, embellished with a supply of warts which had so far defied every art of conjuration, every spell and incantation for their removal, from burying beefsteak under a full moon to assiduous anointment with "witch-oil."

When idle, Lonely had the habit of twitching these fingers restlessly (nervous women he could always put to rout by merely working his double-jointed thumbs). Likewise, he had the somewhat irritating habit of knocking his

heels together. At such times he usually fell to whistling, always out of time and out of tune,[1] with one shoulder hunched ominously up and his bushy russet eyebrows drawn darkly down. He was, in fact, precisely the sort of boy you would suspect if you chanced to find your Crawford's Early ravaged of its last peach, or if your English setter happened to be discovered under the back piazza with a watering-can tied to his tail.

Yet the next day, as you glanced into Lonely's starry and hungry-looking eyes, you might be nervously wondering if, after all, he really got enough to eat at home. Or you

[1] Lonely was, in fact, quite tone-deaf. Yet just how blind he was to this defect may be seen from the fact that when the Cowansburg School began practicing for the annual Christmas Cantata, Lonely boldly volunteered as one of the soprano voices. He escaped detection by simply mouthing, and making no sound, when the teacher chanced to stand at his end of the singing line. One day, however, carried away by the joyous rapture of the music, Lonely absent-mindedly poured out his cacophonous young soul, off key and out of tune, to a bewildered and admiring class. The teacher listened, illuminated, and Lonely was cruelly and peremptorily weeded out and ejected — to his lasting shame and sorrow !

might surprise yourself by solemnly asking his advice about mole-traps and the best way of getting rid of the striped cucumber-bug.

So to the bitter end, you see, Lonely O'Malley must remain a very incongruous muddle-up, a contradictory, evasive, ordinary, mortal boy,—a little more sinewy about the shoulders, a little wilder and less learnedly ignorant, a little more artful and inventive, than may have been many of his kind; but still made up of that ancient and eternal mixture of good and bad which makes one boy so like another.

Sorrow could not lie long on that restless, hunched-up shoulder of Lonely's; and as his first long Saturday morning in Chamboro wore away, his earlier sense of misery went with it. He had just gone through his complete repertoire of animal sounds, a performance of untiring delight to the gurgling Alaska Alice, when he became suddenly aware of an uninvited auditor in a red dress. This auditor took the form of a pair of very yellow braids, a pair of very pink cheeks, and a pair of very blue eyes peering in at him through the fence-pickets.

At these he promptly turned, and made a face — an indescribable contortion of the features, in which he expressed all his old-time, unutterable, and implacable contempt for the softer sex.

At that the little girl with the yellow braids bobbed down her head and drew back, abashed. Recovering herself, she continued on her journey erratically down the sidewalk, her otherwise strange hesitations and gyrations being due to a supreme effort to avoid each and every crevice, for, she artlessly sang to herself as she went:

Step on a crack —
Break your mother's back!

As she passed in front of the bake-shop she came to a stop, and gazed pensively up at the iron railing which guarded the little show-window. Her thoughts were traveling back to the winter day when, in ecstatic contemplation of the sweets within, she had absent-mindedly essayed to suck the frosty iron — and had straightway stuck to it.

Already she saw signs of a new stock for that old, alluring window. And she was a

young lady of much forethought. So she decided to forgive the new baker's son.

Lonely himself grew tired of the silence and the quietness. He glanced furtively up the street after the little girl with the yellow braids. She was returning now, with slow and measured tread, her hands crossed before her, her head bowed with grief. She paid no attention to Lonely, as she passed solemnly by.

"What are y' playin'?" asked the New Boy, tentatively.

"Widow," answered the girl with the yellow braids.

"Widow — what 's that?"

"My husband just died; I 'm in mournin' for him!" she explained sadly, with a bit of a lisp as she spoke.

"H'h!" scoffed Lonely; "how can you be in mournin', in a red dress?"

Here was a stickler, indeed. But the young widow was resourceful.

"Oh, well, my husband died o' scarlet fever!" she said, triumphantly. Then she climbed up on the footboard and leaned in over the fence. There she stood and gazed at Plato with well-meant but unfortunate solicitude.

"Don't you ever feed him things?" she inquired softly.

Lonely glared at his questioner, fiercely



ARE N'T YOU THE NEW BAKER'S LITTLE BOY?

statuesque. Plato changed legs, and rested on another three.

"Oh, and you 've got a baby!" cried the little girl.

"She ain't mine!" explained Lonely, hastily.

"But *is n't* she a darling?" The little girl in red had been sizing up the bake-shop window.

"She ain't much!" deprecated Lonely, melting a little. There was a moment's silence.

"Are n't you the new baker's little boy?" she next demanded, looking at him with wide-open eyes. Her attitude was plainly conciliating, her tone was companionable, and after all, decided Lonely, a girl was at least *something* to talk to.

"Yep!" he answered, carelessly slinging a stone at a telephone pole, neatly smashing the insulating glass, and allowing the "little boy" to pass.

"We've had the scarletina in our house!" she said proudly, as she opened the gate and crept in. "That's why all my dolls is naked."

"They was boiled, so people can't catch it off 'em," she explained, in answer to Lonely's puzzled frown.

"What's your name?" demanded Lonely.

She told him that it was Annie Eliza Gubtill.

"What's yours?"

"Just Lonely — Lonely O'Malley!" He tried to say it airily and off-hand, but his face grew hot over the demeaning and unusual

necessity of explaining who he was — *he*, once the best-known boy in all Cowansburg. But Cowansburg, at that moment, seemed very far away.

"Lonely! *What* a funny name!" avowed Annie Eliza. "Was you called that because no one would ever come in an' play with you?"

"Huh?" snorted Lonely. "Not much, I guess!"

"Then how *did* you ever get such a funny name?"

"It ain't so funny, when you get used to it; it's just a name — same as yours or anybody else's!"

"I s'pose so," soliloquized Annie Eliza. She was persistent, however.

"But were n't you lonely, or something, when they called you that?"

"Naw!" said the boy, in disgust.

Then he hunched a shoulder up and squinted a little — always an ominous sign to those who knew him.

"I was born twins, at first," he explained feelingly. "But the other one of us, he up an' died, an' left me all alone!"

Annie Eliza's face twisted, and she showed signs of impending tears, at this sad confession.

"Then the docter, he wrapped me up in a blanket, and he brung me over to maw, an' he put me in the bed next to her, an' he says, 'This lonely little fellow, you 'll have him to look after.' An' maw, she said, 'Poor, lonely little fellow.' An' she says it kind o' stuck, that word, and so she just called me Lonely,[1] right along."

Annie Eliza wiped her eyes, and Lonely, the artist, gloried in his work, seeing it was good. Then he wakened, as from a dream, and testily demanded of himself just why he had stooped to such easy triumphs.

"Can you come an' play with Lionel Clarence and me, sometimes?" Annie Eliza was asking him.

[1] This touching and fanciful explanation, I regret to say, is and always was quite destitute of historical foundation, notwithstanding the persistence and feeling with which Lonely repeated it when occasion demanded. "Lonely," indeed, was a boyhood corruption of his mother's patronymic, "Lomely," — a corruption, however, which had clung and was to cling to Master O'Malley for many years.

"Mebbe," he sourly conceded.

An awkward silence fell over the two new friends.

"Do you want to see my cut?" the girl finally asked him. This was the supreme mark of her good will.

He admired it as he ought. He was on the point of exhibiting to her his double-jointed thumbs, an exhibition for which of old he had invariably demanded twenty pins, when he remembered himself, and strove desperately to rise above any such ingratiating advances — humbled, broken, and desolate as he was. He asked neither the pity nor the friendship of women folks. And he threw a vindictive pebble or two at Plato, each missile smiting so soundly on his ribs that Annie Eliza was moved to ejaculate an almost tearful "Oh!"

"The poor thing!" she murmured, forgetfully.

"He ain't so poor!" maintained Lonely. "That's his way — he's one of the bony kind!"

"Oh, I see!" said Annie Eliza. A little sigh of sympathy escaped her, however, as she looked at Plato still again.

"But why don't you have a nicer *lookin'* horse?" she persisted.

Then came another of Lonely's dangerous moments. He saw red, and murdered Truth. That Plato had been purchased for fourteen dollars on the market square of Cowansburg, and had been looked upon, first as an instrument of the intended migration, and later as a docile and patient steed for the bake-shop delivery wagon, no longer troubled Lonely.

"Why," he spluttered, "that horse took Pop over the White Pass!"

"Ginger-pop?" asked Annie Eliza, brightening.

"No, Pop, — the old man! An' horses was fallin' dead all around, but Plato, he kept right on, till he got over that White Pass!"

"Where 's the White Pass?"

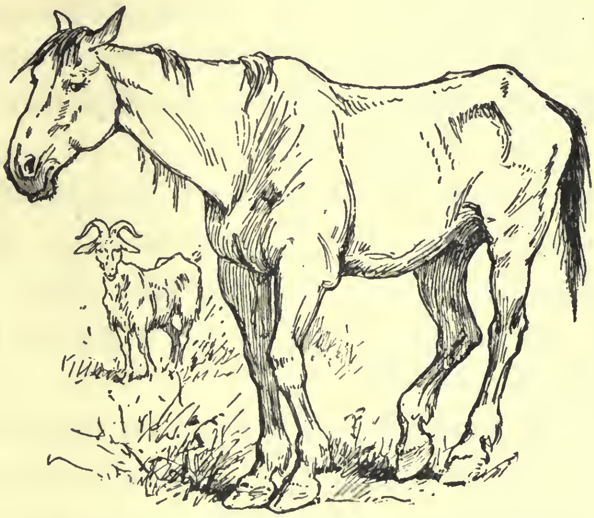
"Why, up in the Klondike somewheres, where Pop made his fortune. Plato there was Pop's best friend all through that trip, an' showed him the way out of a blizzard once, an' another time came an' found him when he was lost!"

"Goodness!" exclaimed Annie Eliza.

"An' — an' Pop says he 's just like a brother

to him, even though he ain't very showy-lookin'. Gee-whittaker! — he would n't sell Plato for all Chamboro!"

"Goodness me! that's different, is n't it?" said Annie Eliza. "He does n't really look so ver-r-ry thin, especially when you see him from the front!"



HE DOES N'T REALLY LOOK SO VER-R-RY THIN!

And so they talked on until, from a near-by yellow house behind the lilac hedge, Annie Eliza's mother called her to dinner. That young lady took her departure reluctantly, saying that she would be back again, and inquiring if Lonely would like to help her make

tatting or come with her and the dolls, sometime, and play in the graveyard.

Lonely's sudden answer, which was not a polite one, somewhat speeded Annie Eliza in her departure. Even after she had disappeared, the New Boy gazed down with moody and far-away eyes at the baby, and without even noting the fact, saw that young lady gleefully and doggedly consume a woolly caterpillar and several handfuls of mud from the remnants of a flower-bed.

Then he made his escape to the back of the stable, where he sought consolation in much chair-rattan smoke, and thought of the old Cowansburg gang, and from time to time wished that he were dead.

Much earlier than Lonely had looked for, however, he was destined to meet with a companion of his own sex, if not altogether of his own bent and disposition. This friend was Lionel Clarence Sampson, the Preacher's son, who lived not half a block away from the little bake-shop.

Gilead was the cheery but unwelcome emissary that brought about the unexpected meeting. For Gilead, having in an unguarded

moment made his escape, proceeded leisurely to the little Town Park lying between the river and Watterson's Creek. There he devoured all of the municipal flower-bed and then most of the park shrubs, and was enjoying the bark from a few of the younger shade-trees when discovered by old Jenkins, the gardener, who drove him ignominiously forth with a spade and much bad language.

Wandering fretfully homeward, Gilead lingered a moment or two in the Sampsons' side yard, over a tempting row of geraniums, set out but a week before by the Preacher's wife. This repast eventually led him to the door of the summer kitchen, where sat Mrs. Sampson herself and a Swedish servant-girl, patiently and contentedly stoning a huge crock of raisins, for her next Christmas pudding, that excellent housekeeper always priding herself on the fact that her puddings of this nature should stand and ripen for at least six months.

Gilead, with a light and confident bound, leaped inside the summer kitchen. At this unlooked-for apparition the Swedish girl fled, screaming lustily. A moment later she was

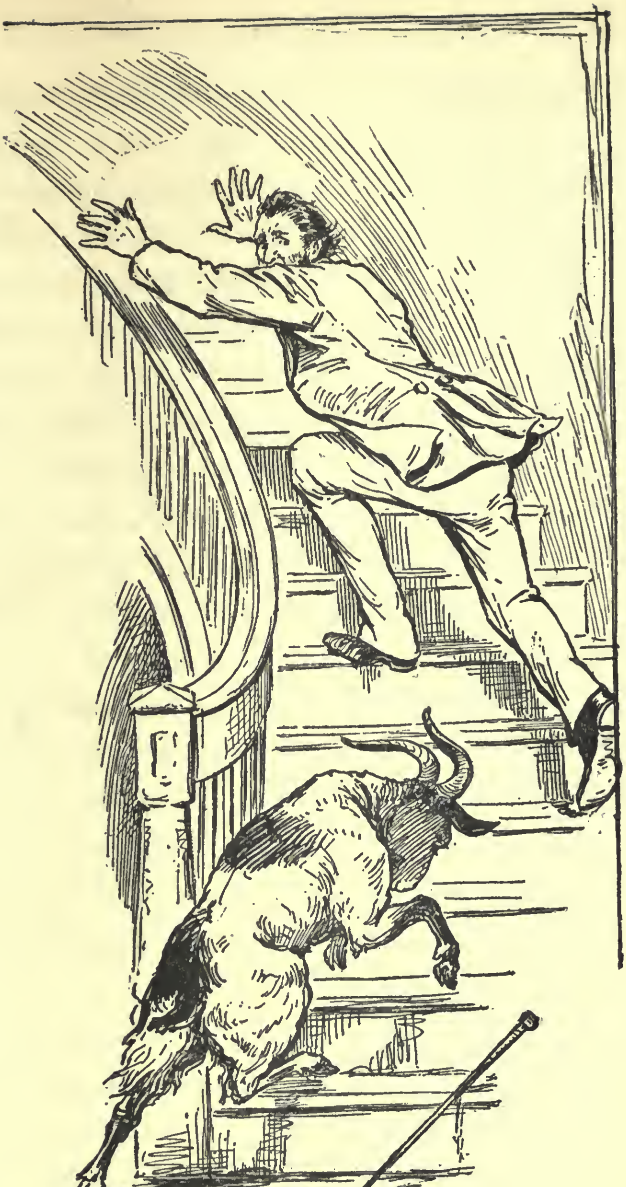
followed, quite briskly, by the more portly Mrs. Sampson.

Once behind the screen-door of the inner kitchen, the two women exhausted every expedient to shoo or drive Gilead away.

Gilead, indeed, made himself quite at home, and discovering the large crock of carefully stoned raisins, slowly, contentedly, and deliberately made away with them, under the rueful eyes of Lionel, his mother, and the Swedish housemaid.

In despair, they at last sent in word to the Reverend James Sampson, busily preparing his sermon in the quietness of his study. That gentleman, noting the devastation which had been wrought, decided to take no half measures. Securing the horse-whip from the driving-shed, he boldly opened the screen-door into the kitchen, and, facing the unperturbed Gilead, vigorously and heatedly chastised the intruder on his hairy back.

It was not until an accidental stroke caught Gilead on the tender tip of the nose that the character of the action altered. Then the intruder turned sharply, and followed Lionel's father through the screen-door into the kitchen,



ONCE MORE UP THE BACK STAIRS

then up the back stairs, then along the upper hall, and down the front stairs, back through the dining-room and the kitchen again, and once more up the back stairs. How long this undignified pursuit might have lasted it would be no easy matter to say, for agile as was the Preacher, Gilead could always skip up the stairs after him more nimbly, even taking time for an occasional butt or two as he went.

Then, in an inspired moment, Lena, the Swedish girl, slammed the door between her master and his pursuer. And there was Gilead, safe and sound, a prisoner in the Preacher's dining-room, where, recovering his composure, he made away with the table-fern and was leisurely nibbling at Mrs. Sampson's window plants, when Lionel Clarence was hurriedly dispatched for the new O'Malley boy, who, it was claimed, was the rightful owner of the trespasser.

Lonely appeared, solemn-eyed, pensive-looking, with one shoulder hunched up. He led Gilead ingloriously forth by means of the chin-whisker, and in the back yard belabored him — where the hair was long and thick — until even the Preacher turned away and

commiseratively demanded that Lonely forbear.

Indeed, Mrs. Sampson presented the startled and wondering New Boy with a huge slice of pound-cake for his bravery, and hoped that he would come regularly to Sunday-school, and always be kind to dumb animals, and not fight with Lionel Clarence, as did the other boys. And Lonely gazed at Lionel Clarence, and said he guessed there would n't be any fighting between them — for Lonely had his tribal pride as to whom he chose for his enemies.

Yet it was out of this untoward incident that sprang the immediate if incongruous friendship between Lonely and the Preacher's son. That very afternoon they met in secret, and being joined later by Annie Eliza and her dolls, they performed a long and elaborate funeral service over the Gubtills' dead canary. Then, touched with a common infection of grief, Lonely assisted in the disinterring of the remains, and was meekly luxuriating in the sorrow consequent upon a second and even more magnificent burial service, when Chamboro's young band of adventurers, drifting somewhat disconsolately and wearily homeward from their truant day

on the river, lined quietly up at the fence, and took in the mourning group with the silence of unspeakable contempt.

Lonely, looking up and finding himself discovered in the midst of an eloquent funereal prayer, flushed hot and cold with a sudden inward rage — a rage more at himself than at his scoffing enemies.

"Makin' mud-pies?" mildly asked Redney McWilliams. There was something maddening in the soft and oily insolence of such a question. Lonely got up from his funeral hands-and-knees position.

"Why, he ain't got curls like the other two!" said one of the tormentors, in mock wonder.

Lonely walked slowly toward the fence, his face white, his jaws set, bristling like an angry terrier.

"I can lick you, you saphead!" he cried shrilly, as he shook his fist in the face of Piggie Brennan, the heaviest of the leering band. "I can lick you, d' you hear! I can lick any blamed one o' you."

A chorus of youthful laughter went up at this ineffectual and frenzied sally.

"Who 's fightin' with females?" inquired Pud Jones.

Then some one tossed a dead sunfish neatly against the starched white blouse of the Preacher's son.

Piggie Brennan, finding a loose picket on the fence, wrenched it off, and deftly and contemptuously flung it for Lonely's shins. Lonely jumped and missed the blow. The laughing band fell back, and went listlessly and carelessly on its way. He was not even worth fighting with!

"Don't you come around me again until you get that hair o' yours cut off! D' you hear me?" Lonely suddenly blazed out at the startled and altogether innocent Preacher's son, in an inconsequential rage that was as unlooked for as it was passionate. And he contemptuously kicked over tombstone, burial casket, and canary hearse, and strode away.

The River of Youth

From all the golden hills of dream,
Dew-cool and rainbow kissed,
It twines and glides, a silver stream,
Through valleys hung with mist,

Down past Enchanted Woods to where
Romance walks ever young,
Where Kings ride forth to take the air
On steeds with velvet hung,—

Where secret stairways tempt the bold,
Where Pirate Caves abound,
And many a chest of Spanish gold
May solemnly be found!

Through magic years it twines and creeps,
Past Towers of peacock blue,
Where still some ancient Princess sleeps,
And dreams come always true!

Then gleam by gleam the light goes out,
Then darkened, grief by grief,
It sighs into our Sea of Doubt,
And Manhood's Unbelief!

CHAPTER III

In which false Gods are pursued

"YOUNG man, why ain't you a-gittin' some schoolin'?"

The angular woman in the black bead bonnet shifted her basket of fish from her right arm to her left, and gazed at Lonely with unrelaxing severity. Lonely, in turn, hunched up a shoulder and continued to study the feats of the bareback riders in the new circus poster, whereon the paste had not yet had time to dry.

"Why ain't you gittin' some schoolin'?" repeated the woman with the glinting and dangling black beads.

"Don't need none, I guess!" said Lonely.

He worked his double-jointed fingers energetically: this often had the effect of driving women folks away.

"Don't need *none!* Would you listen to that grammar! Don't need any schoolin', and a-murderin' good language that way!"

"Schoolin' ain't everything!" maintained the boy, stoutly. Yet he had his sneaking



WHY AIN'T YOU A-GITTIN' SOME SCHOOLIN'?

doubts as to that dictum, though he had often enough heard it fall from the lips of his father. Even at that moment he was longing and aching to be able to cipher out to the uttermost the descriptive superlatives which bordered so mysteriously the circus bill before him. But the big words stuck him, every time.

"No, it ain't everything, *Mister* O'Malley. But what do you ever expect to amount to, without bein' able to talk decent?"

"I don't see 's talk 'll ever build a flyin'-machine!" cried the boy, in a sudden little rage. "And I 'm *a-goin'* to school, anyway, 's soon as summer holidays is over!"

"Be you!" mocked the pleader for higher education, wondering what flying-machines had to do with the question. The boy paused to pull Alaska Alice away from the bill-board, where she was contentedly making her dinner on a little pool of scattered paste.

"And when I get into that school," went on Lonely, as he faced the black beads again, and suddenly burned with the foolish passion of the conqueror for conquest, "when I *do* get in that school, I 'll show 'em a thing or two about book-learnin'!" And as the vaunting heat of his vain little fire left him, he added: "And maybe something about mindin' my own business, too!"

"And mebbe something about mindin' your manners, too!" snapped the angular woman with the basket, as she and her beaded bonnet went tartly on their way, leaving Lonely,

who had been in the seventh heaven of the imagination dreaming of circus sounds and sights and smells and memories, vaguely yet sharply discomforted for the rest of the morning.

"I 'm sick o' this town," he said, moodily. "I 'm goin' to be a trapper, and hunt Indians!"

But being joined by Lionel Clarence later in the day, they fell to studying the circus posters once more, while Lonely considerately explained to the Preacher's son how the otherwise inexplicable suppleness of the real circus acrobat was due, of course, to the fact that in early infancy he had his backbone cut out. And still later, in the stable-loft, they delighted Annie Eliza and three of her little girl friends with a terrific sword combat, in which Lonely, arrayed in swimming-trunks, magnificently bled to death — by means of a cow's bladder filled with raspberry vinegar, purloined from the unsuspecting Mrs. Sampson's cellar.

Indeed, as Lonely more and more realized that he was foredoomed to the companionship of Lionel Clarence, he took the Preacher's son more and more in hand, doing his best to make a man of him.

With much secret exercise on a haymow trapeze, much surreptitious sucking of eggs, much punching and thumping of his tender and attenuated young body, and many copious applications of that marvel of boyhood lubrications, Angle-Worm Oil, — manufactured from a bottle of those fish-worms known as "night-crawlers," carefully corked up in water and hung in the sun until the resulting compound, reputed to make the body limber, is certainly odoriferous enough to make the stomach unsettled — with all these cogent agencies, I repeat, Lonely worked over Lionel Clarence, and wrought wonders in the once despised and anæmic Preacher's son.

He taught him how to do the cart-wheel, he taught him his Neeley upper-cut and his Cowansburg "trip," he schooled him in the science of wrestling, and in the arts of frog-spearing, initiated him into the mysteries and delights of the mullein leaf, the dried grapevine, and the throat-scalding Indian tobacco-plant. One memorable day he took him in secret to the upper river swimming hole, and although the water was still disagreeably chilly, he sternly held the Preacher's son's clothing

in bond until that blue-skinned and shivering youth timidly essayed "dog-fashion," spluttering, moaning, shrieking, making weird faces, rolling his eyes, forlornly calling for his mother, and finally skimming naked up the bank and across two hay-fields, once the disgusted Lonely had released him.

His instructor tried to lure him back again by airily doing "the over-stroke," by showing him how luxurious it was to float, by treading water, by triumphantly "bringing up bottom" out in the middle of the river, and even diving backwards off the sycamore roots. Lionel began to cry with the cold, however, and at last Lonely relented. But only for that afternoon. For sternly and rigorously the lessons were repeated, until the Preacher's son proudly eschewed "dog-fashion" and caught the knack of the more honored "frog-motion," and even attempted a timid dive or two.

From that day on, Mrs. Sampson, without knowing it, was the mother of two sons: one, Lionel Clarence Sampson, sickly, frail, timorous, forever having headaches, and forever getting pains in the stomach just before school-

time; the other, "Shag" Sampson (so called by Lonely because of his ample mane of yellowish-brown hair), short-windedly combative, but both audacious and predaceous.

In return for these favors Lonely demanded periodic tutorship in the elements of English grammar, and with cramped-up fingers and strangely contorted face filled out Lionel's unused copy-books, and, on the Sampsons' driving-shed roof pored over some many-thumbed "Rollo Dialogues," and, at last, flung the book into the rhubarb-bed, with the contemptuous verdict that Rollo was a "stiff," and that he was sick and tired of pottering round with fool books, anyway!

Whereupon the two restless spirits, full of their vernal disquiet, caught the Barrisons' cat and painted it a delicate pink with the remnants of the bottle of raspberry vinegar, left over from the sword combat. Then, picking on a suitably out-of-the-way and secret spot, Lonely and Lionel Clarence worked long and mysteriously at the river-bank with an old spade, well shadowed from the public view by a clump of dwarf-willow and wild grapevine. The result was a cave, with a smoke-vent

through an old stovepipe above, the roof well shored up with purloined fence-boards, the entrance necessarily commanding a secret view of the river. In this cave Lionel Clarence took much delight, and countless colds in the head.

Even Annie Eliza was not made acquainted with the secret passage leading to this lonely refuge, meekly and faithfully as she followed Lionel and the New Boy in all less mysterious adventures. Although Annie Eliza had even sniffed knowingly at their clothes, and recognized the telltale odor of Indian tobacco, she had remained discreetly silent and loyal. Lonely would have tabooed her heartlessly but for her new-born devotion to Alaska Alice, whom she minded and wheeled and carried about crooningly, thus giving Lonely an unlooked for chance for wandering and adventure, in which, when possible, the Preacher's son joined him.

All might have gone well but for the fact that one warm afternoon Mrs. Sampson went to the back hall window, to open the sash, while she finished her upstairs sweeping. Her startled glance happened to fall on the sun-

bathed shingles of the driving-shed, and there, lying luxuriously out in the warm sunshine, with their legs crossed and expressions of



OUT IN THE WARM SUNSHINE

ineffable content on their young faces, were Lonely O'Malley and her son Lionel Clarence. The good woman leaned on the handle of her carpet-sweeper and gasped. For in the hand of each of the boys before her was a stout piece of dried grapevine, and from time to time, as each lay there, he drew in long inhalations of pungent smoke, and emitted it from between his pursed-up lips with slow and placid breaths.

Mrs. Sampson leaned over the front banister and gently called her husband from the study. The Preacher followed the direction of her indignant index finger, adjusted his glasses, looked again, and yet again, gasped a little, and was scarcely able to believe his eyes.

The Preacher's son was just on the point of taking a fresh light, and Lonely was carelessly flecking the ash from the end of his weed, with a twitch of the little finger known only to the connoisseur.

"Lionel Clarence Sampson!" cried a sudden stentorian voice, out of the smoke-hung stillness.

At the first familiar cadence of that deep chest-tone, Lonely lifted his heel from the nail which held him on the sloping shingles, and with great neatness and dispatch disappeared in one quick slide down the east side of the shed. From there he made his prompt escape under a broken base-board on the back fence, and from the secure position of the Allison's chicken-coop roof waited proceedings.

Lionel, at the sound of that voice, dropped his telltale burning brand, as though stung

by a sudden electric shock. Then, without moving from the spot where he lay, he began to weep, audibly and convulsively.

"Come down from that roof, Lionel Clarence!" said his father, with significant solemnity, as he strode wrathfully out into the back yard. Lionel Clarence, wailing more eloquently than ever, slowly and reluctantly made his descent.

"A son of mine, indulging in the pernicious and loathsome practice of smoking, of loitering with evil companions!" A moment after saying this a mysterious cabbage-root landed with a resounding whack against the driving-shed wall. The Preacher looked quickly about, but no one was in sight. Then he reached forth and grasped his son and heir, firmly and significantly.

"Remember, James, he is your son!" cried the half-relenting mother from the upper hall window, as she saw the two disappear into the secrecy of the driving-shed. A moment later vigorous and prolonged cries came forth into the still afternoon air. Lonely listened, with one shoulder hunched up, his eye glued to the back fence.

When the Preacher emerged, flushed and heated, he once more looked carefully about. But no one was to be seen.

"Now, I shall go to young Master O'Malley's parents, at once, and advise them of this depravity, this vicious and degrading habit!"

"You *do* an' I 'll sick my goat onto you!" said a challenging voice, from the rear of the back fence.

"What — what 's this?" demanded the Preacher. "Where are you, sir?"

"I 'm right here! An' I say if you go tattlin' round about me I 'll sick Gilead onto you until you wish you had wings!"

And Lonely turned wearily homeward, tired of the dispiriting drama. This was what he got, he told himself, for playing with preachers' sons, and mixing up with people who wear velvet and ruffles!

Forthwith, from that day of wrath, however, Lionel Clarence was rigidly and sternly enjoined from companionship with Lonely O'Malley. So the New Boy was thrown on his own devices. He even once more took up with Annie Eliza, and in his desolation of

spirit mended her dolls for her, and made rope hair for their too rigorously sterilized heads, and helped her play at housekeeping, and assisted in the moulding of mud-pies, and sat and patiently looked on at many unsuccessful sewing efforts. He even forgave her passionate and ghoulish love for the graveyard, and retired there to eat green apples and salt with her, and gathered May-flowers for her, and carved her initials on the old beech-tree in the cow-pasture.

Not that Lonely's heart had either failed or betrayed him, or that he was deep in love with Annie Eliza. His passion had long since been ideally consecrated to a certain Little Eva, who had appeared two years before in The Holden Combination Uncle Tom's Cabin Company, and sold her photographs between the acts — a beautiful, golden-haired, azure-eyed creature, half angel and half girl, whose dress he had touched as she passed down the crowded aisle, whom he had never so much as spoken to, and yet of whom he still brooded and dreamed. It is true Annie Eliza had her charm. She lisped just a little, and what, thought Lonely at times, could be prettier

than a lisp. She also toed-in a trifle when she walked, and it had never occurred to Lonely that toeing-in could be done so fascinatingly. And then she was so dog-faithful, and never tattled! She at least filled in the time, he magnanimously decided.

He did not, however, give over all his days and thoughts to the softer sex, during this interregnum of idleness. A good deal of the time he worked secretly on his flying-machine, up in the stable hay-loft, and many days he went off on lonely excursions, towards the upper river, out past the Commons, past Blue Hollow and the brick-yards, where, beyond the bald hills and clay slopes, dwelt a barbarian and outlandish people, and where, when a stranger appeared, he was apt to be hooted at and stoned. They were a watchful and a warlike lot, these far-off barbarians, and on more than one occasion they did their best to cut off Lonely's retreat, hunting in packs like wolves, mysteriously appearing and disappearing, yet never quite able to corner the alert young intruder with the sling-shot and the freckled nose. For they had caves and fires and dug-outs, these outlanders, and they

obeyed no law but their own. It was darkly rumored, even, that there was blood on their hands, — the blood of an old gray farm-horse, abandoned to the road and corralled and captured in a time of famine, when portions of the prize, cooked over a cave fire, had been stoically and perseveringly chewed on by certain members of the ruthless band.

Yet, as the bake-shop window became refilled with chocolate mice in little cardboard boxes, and balls of pop-corn, and all-day suckers, and appetizing-looking bulls-eyes, and candies of various colors and kinds, Annie Eliza's devotion to Lonely became more and more demonstrative and more and more compelling. He even allowed himself to surrender to that soft invasion, forgetting the love he had consecrated to the mythical Little Eva of other days, forsaking his bluff manhood, and allowing certain new and quite pleasurable sensations to awaken in his languid breast. Roving and predatory bands of town boys passed up and down the streets before him, now almost unheeded. In far-off fields and lanes and alleys great deeds were being done, and strange adventures essayed; but

he, he told himself, cared nothing for them. A soft rose-tint of unreality clothed all his world. He grew moody and morose. He even tried to put his feelings into song, on several occasions. One of these he actually indited, in his own blood, and left under the sidewalk crossing for Annie Eliza. He washed his face without being nagged to do so, behind the ears and all. He likewise purchased a fifteen-cent bottle of perfume, and in the mornings smugly wet and plastered down his thick mat of russet hair, and on one occasion tallowed it copiously, only disgustedly to wash it off with coal-oil on being asked by his father if he had been swimming near the slaughter-house again. He even grew sensitive as to deportment and apparel, and always took off his hat in the house, and passed things at table, and attempted many striking efforts toward personal adornment, from a hold-back strap off the harness for a belt, to a discarded necktie of his father's, — to say nothing of a huge glass buckle-head purloined from Plato's bridle, and now riveted jauntily on the lapel of his coat.

Even the impending advent of the circus

scarcely shook the tranquil and enfeebled spirit of Lonely out of its Dorian sloth and content. He still read the bills dreamily, but found the old thrill to be wanting. When one particularly resplendent pageant appeared on the street side of the Barrisons' barn, however, it moved him to suggest pensively to Annie Eliza that they get up a circus of their own.

This performance was given in the big box-stall of the O'Malley stable, neatly draped with quilts, and the admission was ten pins. The procession was an imposing one, with Gilead leading, the Gubtills' tom-cat coming next, then a squirrel-cage containing two red squirrels, a canary in a bird-cage, two dogs, and a very indignant setting-hen, on a wheelbarrow.

Although Lonely, adorned for the occasion in a suspiciously feminine-looking woven shirt, turkey-red trunks made by Annie Eliza and himself, and a pair of long black stockings secretly borrowed from his mother's bedroom bureau-drawer, executed marvelous feats on the trapeze, did the muscle-grind, skinned the cat, made the bird's nest, turned back hand-springs, stood on his head, walked on his

hands, and essayed a flip-flop which did not quite materialize, — although our bright star, I repeat, indulged in marvels of strength and resorted to great feats of agility, his glory was dimmed by the sad consciousness that his awe-struck and admiring audience was made up of only eleven small girls, three babies in arms, and five diminutive males, all so young that they still wore frocks and dresses.

What counted the sighs and shouts of delight from such an audience; where, indeed, it was so easy to impress, and so worthless to be a wonder!

The last act of the performance was to have been an aërial dive from the top of the stall partition to a pile of timothy hay. But Lonely, in the excitement of the moment, decided to give his admiring and open-mouthed audience a few gratuitous exhibitions of strength. His first test of muscular prowess was an attempt to dislodge a suspicious-looking pine upright, which supported the wavering old hay-loft flooring. This inspired feat of our modern young Samson was eminently successful, for with it he brought down both the house and the roof, and at the same time forced the day's



MARVELOUS FEATS ON THE TRAPEZE

performance to come to a confused and ignominious end.

When the last child had emerged from the hay and dust, and the tumult had subsided, the entire audience repaired sorrowfully to the bake-shop window, where they drew up in a hungry circle and lingered wistfully, to feast in spirit on the array of good things within. For with the arrival and display of a wonderful new stock of licorice-sticks, pepper-drops, butter-scotch, and caramels, this window had become the centre of attraction for all the neighborhood. Little girls licked the iron guard-rail in silent and pensive ecstasy. Babies were held up to flatten their little noses against the pane, to drum and paw ineffectually at the highly colored confections within. Small boys tarried to smack their lips over the box of chocolate mice. And as half a dozen times a day Lonely sauntered airily in and out of the magic door behind which lay all this wealth, it is no wonder that sly advances were made to him, and that Betty Doyle gave him her agate alley, and that Lulu Barrison extended to him a generous and significant invitation to come and witness the poisoning of their cat.

Even Annie Eliza herself was not altogether disinterested in her attachment, and, with, perhaps, quite unconscious venality, admired Lonely's muscles in public, and ran errands for him, and herded Gilead and Plato when necessary, and showed to the envious denizens of the street that she was the lady of Lonely's favor.

All of these flattering advances the idle Cæsar received with a reserve that was both dignified and non-committal.

He was even artfully questioned, at last, as to the quantity of candy and maple-sugar allowed to him day by day. Whereat he laughed scoffingly, and curled his lips with contempt.

"Don't talk to me 'bout candy an' maple-sugar!" he commanded.

"Why?" demanded Annie Eliza, plaintively.

"'Cause I'm sick an' tired o' candy!"

A look of mingled incredulity and longing was directed toward the window by his circle of listeners. Never in all time had such a thing been heard of before.

"Do you mean you can eat maple-sugar,

an' car'mels, an' things, just whenever you like?" asked Betty Doyle.

"'Course I can!" said Lonely, importantly.

A little chorus of wondering "Ohs!" went up from the astonished circle.

"Why," proceeded Lonely, seeing red, and once more proceeding to murder Truth,— "why, all I got to do is to take a box and sit down an' eat w'at I want. But choc'late mice are w'at take *me!* They 're great, are n't they? So soft an' mushy inside, an' then the taste of the choc'late kind o' mixed in with it!" He felt in his pocket with a sudden remembering hand. "Gee! I had six or seven in here a few minutes ago! Must have forgot an' eaten 'em up, I guess!"

He paced up and down in front of the bake-shop with a swelling sense of his own importance, puffing up like a pouter pigeon.

"Who 'd 'a' thunk it!" said the impressed but illiterate Jennie Biffins, wiping her mouth with her dress-sleeve.

"I guess I 'll have a car'mel or two now!" said Lonely, casually. He opened the little bell-hung door and disappeared. A minute



DON'T TALK TO ME ABOUT CANDY

later he reappeared before the circle, swallowing hard and licking his lips.

"Ain't so good as the last lot!" he said, critically. The circle of wide-eyed listeners nudged one another knowingly, and shook their heads in solemn wonder. To Lonely there was something almost intoxicating in the sunlight of this open admiration. The potential glories of his inheritance had never before dawned upon him. The circle was waiting for further information.

"Why," the New Boy went on, off-hand, "Pop comes up out o' the bake-oven an' says to me, kind o' cross, too, 'Lonely, why ain't you eaten that maple-sugar up, so as your maw can wash the pans out!'"

A sigh went up from the circle.

"'You finish up them choc'late mice,' he says, 'before you go out an' play this morning!' An' of course I 've got to eat 'em, — got to, whether I want to or not. He gits purty mad if he sees me tryin' to sneak out without doin' what he says."

This time his auditors gasped, openly.

"But, Lonely," interposed Annie Eliza, quite impersonally and innocently, "don't you

ever feel like gettin' somebody to help you?"

"How d' you mean?"

"Why, when he's mad about you not doing them kind o' things fast enough!"

"Nope," said Lonely. "Pop don't like folks round the shop!"

"Then when yer goin' to bring us out some?" piped up a very young and indiscreet little boy in a checked petticoat.

Lonely looked at him scornfully, hunched up his shoulder, and turned away to the window.

At last, driven beyond endurance, Annie Eliza herself repeated that audacious question.

"Why, any old time, I guess," answered the baker's son, carelessly. "An' some choc'-late mice, too, eh?" he added, making an indescribable clucking noise with his tongue, against the roof of his mouth, as he wagged his head and pointed out the pasteboard box filled with rodent delicacies, to the end of each one of which was attached an elastic tail, making them all the more wonderful and lifelike.

A dozen mouths watered at the thought, involuntarily. They crowded round him, and

eyed him reverentially, and brought him little gifts and remembrances, and emulating Annie Eliza, audibly enlarged on the size and strength of his muscles, and the wonder of his circus tricks, and even allowed that Plato was the handsomest horse in Chamboro, and conceded Gilead to be the gentlest and most innocent animal that ever browsed on a flower-bed.

And as for Lonely, he became quite drunk with the dizzy consciousness of his power, and although deep down in his heart he knew it was an illicit and perverted sense of mastery, an unworthy field of conquest, he made it suffice him, for the time being. He passed back and forth among them with a sort of lordly independence, making no return for the hungry and melting eyes which tiny girls made after him, and offering no reward for the patience with which the smaller children waited for him to come out and play, and the celerity with which they gathered chips for him, and cleaned out the stable, and even delivered an occasional special order for bread, without so much as eating one pinch from the soft and temptingly odorous middle of the loaf.

So after that, Lonely went in and out of the

house by way of the bake-shop, and whenever he beheld an audience awaiting his egress, he appeared before them smacking his lips with great relish and protesting he could still taste that last chocolate mouse. But never a chocolate mouse, or a licorice-stick, or an all-day sucker did he deign to pass on to his band of hungering and still hoping worshipers and followers. Six new glass jars of sweets added to the poignancy of their misery, standing on a shelf in alluring regularity, marked "Peppermint," "Wintergreen," "Lemon Drops," "Horehound," "Extra Mixed," and last, but not least, "Brandy Drops."

This latest spectacular addition to the bake-shop's stock was too much even for the Preacher's son, then strictly enjoined to shun and eschew the society of Lonely O'Malley. Lionel Clarence, after feasting his eyes on the wonderful window, crowded in among the little baby-carriages and go-carts and urchins and damsels of the street, and once more met his old friend Lonely in secret. Then, flaunting all parental mandates, he stole a saucepan from the home kitchen and with the New Boy repaired to Watterson's Creek, where

they caught, stewed, and ate a goodly meal of crayfish.

It was the arrival and display of a fine lot of maple-sugar that eventually overcame Annie Eliza, and prompted her ruthlessly and decisively to smash her savings-bank with a hammer. Then gathering up her seven scattered pennies, she took destiny in her own hand, and went straight to the bake-shop. Discovering Betty Doyle with her nose flattened hungrily against the window, she told her of her venturous plan.

Together they invaded the little shop, as the tiny bell above the door rang with a shrill and awe-inspiring clatter. Once across that sacred portal, they gazed about them bewildered, almost overcome by the wealth of the treasure before them.

Lonely's father, the far-famed hero of the Klondike, was busy at the bake-ovens,[1] and to their chagrin, they caught not even a fleeting glimpse of that illustrious but self-effacing

[1] Fortunately for his business, Timothy O'Malley had taken unto himself a partner, a one-legged German bearing the illustrious name of Bismarck, whose duty it was to deliver bread and collect accounts.

man. His wife, however, was busily engaged in wiping down the shelves, putting a newspaper over a large pan of cooling maple-sugar, which had just gone through a frugal course of dilution with wholesome brown sugar.

Annie Eliza could n't decide whether to take all chocolate mice, or half in some of the fresh maple-sugar. She finally compromised on a chocolate mouse and a pennyworth of candy from each and every one of the six new jars.

While this purchase was being counted out, Lonely's voice sounded wistfully from without the back door of the little shop.

"Say, maw, ain't you a-goin' to let me scrape out that maple-sugar pot?"

Annie Eliza and Betty looked at each other, electrified.

"Lonely, you stop nagging!" answered his mother, as she dropped the seven pennies in a cigar-box behind the counter.

"But I ain't had a taste of any of this good stuff since we moved in!" continued the doleful and reproving voice of Lonely.

The two shoppers exchanged glances.

"You know what your father said about

that, Lonely!" warned his mother, as she took up her brush once more.

"Well, I think it's—it's *rotten*, I can't have a taste o' candy now and then!" he almost howled, in irate indignation.

The two visitors withdrew, breathlessly. The revelation had come. Lonely O'Malley was a cheat, an impostor, a make-believe! The little bell over the door had scarcely grown still, once more, before the news spread up and down the street like wild-fire.

Two hours later a youthful Cæsar stepped pompously forth from the Forum, unconscious of the awaiting assassin's blow. He was rubbing his stomach gleefully, and smacking his lips with unspeakable gusto.

"Gee, that new maple-sugar is good!" he declared, with a wag of the head.

A shrill and hostile jeer went up from the once loyal and fawning circle.

Lonely turned to Annie Eliza, puzzled. That young lady, with a face very much besmeared and gummy, thrust forward her chin, distorted her sugar-coated pink cheeks, and stuck out a defiant, contemptuous, and snake-like tongue at him.

"Goin' to let me scrape out the maple-sugar pot?" mocked and taunted Betty Doyle, with bitter laughter. A dozen young voices were quick to take up the cry, and together his once faithful adherents danced off down the street, flinging back at him that Parthian taunt. He leaned disconsolately against the bake-shop door, and knew that the day of his tyranny was over, that even his mock rule, his pretendership, had come to an ignominious close. Then he made his escape to the haymow, where he worked feverishly and soothingly on his flying-machine. After all, it was just as well; this was not the kingdom, this little land of braids and petticoats, in which a Cæsar should feel at home. It was all over, and for all time, between him and Annie Eliza.



STUCK OUT A SNAKE-LIKE TONGUE AT HIM

His awakening may have been a rude and

chastening one, but through it he learned, as other warriors had learned, that women cannot make up all a man's world, that Calypso cannot always hold out her softer charms to a Ulysses, old or new, that the tawniest-haired Cleopatra cannot always bind a Cæsar in slavish bonds. He hungered once more for a world of arms and men, for the turbulence of his own kind, for the dust and battle of real boyhood!

Then, finding that even work on his ever-troublesome flying-machine palled, he descended from the hay-loft, and making his escape over the back fence, sat in the sun and moodily yet raptly contemplated the circus poster covering one whole side of the Barrisons' barn. Then, with a sudden tingle of delight, he saw, as he looked at the foot-bill, that the following day was the date for its arrival. That such an event could slip his memory showed eloquently enough how enslaved and unmanned he had been. The circus was coming, and he had forgotten it!

Then he fell to studying the poster once more, wondering if there would be more than eleven elephants — that colossal number hav-

ing actually made up the last Cowansburg parade. Then he turned to marveling at the strange climate of the pictured landscape before him, where side by side with the polar bear striding back and forth on his icy berg, the giraffe nibbled nonchalantly at the top of a luxuriant palm-tree, and the trained seal smoked his pipe in the very midst of a stately caravan of Arabian camels wending circuitously about an arid Sahara of sand.

Made young with the April hills, once more
With you as a child I went;
And the dusk was filled with a calmer joy,
And the twilight with content.

And under the stars I drew you close,
And you lay on my very heart;
Yet we, O Child, as world from world,
Were a million leagues apart!

CHAPTER IV

In which there is a Triumphal Procession

ONLY a few birds were singing drowsily in the early morning dusk when Lonely stole through the side door, well out of sight from the bakery window, climbed the back fence, and cut across half a dozen vacant lots to the Cannery, and from there to the Boiler Works, and from there to the Railway Siding itself. The air was cool and quiet and dark, and the heavy dew wet his feet. He had gone forth breakfastless, stopping only long enough to devour a handful or two of malignantly green gooseberries from the Gubtills' bushes.

But for all that, it was a great and glorious morning.

For there, already drawing up on the Siding, was the shabbily flamboyant circus train, the gaudily lettered sleepers, the flat-cars with the solemnly covered wagons — wagons with wheels of vivid red and gold showing beneath the draggled canvas — the disembarking animals, the hurrying, hallooing, bustling, swearing

circus hands, already in the midst of their day's work, with the sun not yet up over the eastern hills.

It was, I suppose, the same old shoddy circus, with the same old shoddy tents and methods, and the same old indescribable smells and sounds, that has been alighting magically in small towns and as magically disappearing by night again, for a full half-century back.

Yet it was all once more new and strange and marvelous to Lonely, — the flash of the highly varnished floats, the cluck of the heavy little wagon wheels, the clinking and rattling of the chains, the shuffling and sleepy-eyed elephants (which promptly kill the reckless youth who dares to feed them so much as a thimbleful of chewing-tobacco, or, should he escape for the day, years hence will remember and single out the inexorably doomed offender), the enchanting, musty animal-smells, the grimy and foreign-looking tent-hands and stake-drivers, redolent of mystery and strong tobacco (to hold for whom even a halter shank was a never-to-be-forgotten honor), the trotting, nimble-footed Shetland ponies, the deceptive-

looking zebra, whose kick was reputed to be fatal, the long-striding and stately-necked camels, the confused snarl and roar of invisible animals behind the alluring little shuttered windows, leaving youth to wonder which could be the tameless Royal Bengal Tiger and which the old Man-Eating Leopard with so many lives to his credit. Was it any wonder, indeed, that Lonely's sleep had been broken and brief the night before?

He had hoped to be on the field before any of the town boys; but when he arrived a dozen scantily-robed urchins and half a hundred men were already lined up along the railway tracks. So Lonely, after wistfully but ineffectually following one of the drivers back and forth between the railway and the tent grounds, side-tracked his attention to a more alert-looking man in a black derby, and through so doing was at last permitted to carry a pair of huge rubber boots, a leather bucket, and four horse-blankets. There was something foreign and fine, he decided, even in the smell of those particular horse-blankets.

He was struggling under this load toward the main tent entrance, happy but almost

breathless, when the man in the black derby called sharply after him.

"Here you, Redhead, fetch them things round to the cook-tent!"

Lonely obeyed meekly and promptly,— though in the ordinary affairs of life he allowed no such expletives to pass unchallenged,— feeling for the moment that he was a part of that vast and stupendous machinery of amusement.

He followed his guardian in under one of the smaller tents, where his intoxicated young nostrils caught their first whiff of canvas and sawdust,— a smell like unto which there is and can be no other. Later, mingled with this strange odor, he detected the smell of coffee and cooking meat. This brought him to a standstill, causing him to scratch his russet little head absently, and wonder just how long it was since he had breakfasted and just how it was meat and coffee could smell so good.

Then, coming to his senses and getting more accustomed to his surroundings, he beheld two long tables, at which more or less grimy and hungry and tired-looking men and women sat, bolting down a hurried breakfast.

One keen glance at them showed him plainly enough that these common and earthly looking persons were not the Great Beings who guided rocking and lurching Roman chariots, and fluttered around rings in crimson tights and spangled breech-cloths, and spun about trapezes in pink and gold and blue, daringly defying danger and death, and setting at naught, as the bill-boards distinctly said, all and every law of gravitation! They were the same as other folks, only hungrier and wearier looking, thought Lonely, as he still waited awkwardly, loath to take his departure into the mere light of common day.

"Catch, Starry Eyes," cried a fat woman with yellow hair, as she tossed a hot biscuit at his head. This he caught on the fly, neatly, and straightway tucked securely down in his deepest blue denim overalls' pocket. Being a real and genuine circus biscuit, it was, obviously, something too consecrated to eat.

The fat woman laughed at this, and a moment later the whole table seemed smiling at Lonely, who drew back a little, abashed. Yet behind the cheery and grateful unconcern of his answering grin he had decided that at the

first grain of encouragement from them he would forsake his home and his family and his half-finished air-ship, and run away with them for all time, to carry water and hay to the elephants for the rest of a happy, happy life.

Lonely's old friend with the derby hat came in hurriedly, and sat down at one end of the long table.

"Anything else I c'n do for you?" the boy managed to squeeze out, in a sudden burst of courage.

The man at the end of the table looked Lonely up and down, sharply.

"Anything more?" asked Lonely, with one wistful shoulder hunched up.

"Yes, Carrots, there is," answered the man. "Here, sit down here!"

Lonely sat down, wonderingly.

"Now, put this into your face!"

And before the boy could fully understand, there was shoved over in front of him a cup of steaming coffee and a plate on which stood a goodly slice of beefsteak and a hot biscuit swimming in gravy.

Lonely devoured this plateful in rapt silence,

far too moved to talk. He even wondered if it would be all right to keep the bone, as a sort of sacred relic.

"Now, Sunshine, d' you want a job?"

Lonely did.

"D' you think you can hustle in to the



NOW, PUT THIS INTO YOUR FACE!

Mayor's house with this letter? Or d' you know where he hangs out?"

"Yep!" answered Lonely promptly, without a quaver. He knew that he could soon find out — which amounted to about the same thing.

"He 'll give you a note to fetch back.

Have it here good and quick, and I 'll make you my head trapeze man!"

Lonely looked at him steadily.

"I 'd rather do tumblin'," he ventured, earnestly; and he wondered just why the man hawhawed a little, as he pushed him hurriedly out of the tent.

He sped away from the musty-smelling place of hunger, dead drunk, hopelessly intoxicated with that wine which can be bought at few inns and leaves no taste of ashes on the lips of youth.

It was all over and done with. Alaska Alice, the flying-machine, home and friends, they were things of the past. He was to go away and join the circus!

Lonely made his way into the town floating on clouds, to the sound of celestial music. Unseeing and unheeding, he passed little hurrying groups of boys — leaving them to gaze in wonder after the Outlander who could so defy the last law of juvenile gravitation and travel away, at such a time, from that eternal centre of attraction, the circus tent.

Houses were opening up sleepily, shutters were being taken down from shop-windows,

the streets were wakening to their first stir of life. And during that morning Lonely had already lived through so much! He had seen the elephants unloaded, and herded, and fed, the canvas unrolled, the main-top hoisted, the two sawdust rings laid out, the camels watered and groomed, the wagons of crimson and gold unhooded, — and last of all, he had taken the final step which led to the eternal glory and glitter of the circus tumbler.

The Mayor of Chamboro, like the little town over which he held quiet sway, was of a somnolent turn of mind. It was only after a long and weary wait that Lonely, with his precious letter, once more made his winged way back to the circus grounds.

He found his friend of the cook-tent now mounted to a little office on wheels, the centre of a new world of activity, of hurrying men, and questioning attendants, and hastily dispatched orders. He took one sharp look at Lonely, caught the paper from his hand, ran his eye over it, and rattled out:

"Be at the ticket-wagon at one!"

Lonely's last plaguing doubt died away at that too significant and business-like speech.

"Will I go on to-day?" he asked, in a transport.

"On? Go on? How d' you mean?"

"You said I was to be one o' the tumblers?" said Lonely, bravely.

The man was either too busy or too generous to laugh outright at the boy. He glanced down into the hungry, wistful face, and for one fleeting moment the grim corners of his mouth went up. Then, with a brusque "Ticket-wagon at one!" he waved the boy aside, and a moment later was in a fiery dispute about the beef supply for the lions, heatedly resenting the monopolistic methods of Chamboro's local butcher. To his last day Lonely always privately believed that it was Piggie Brennan's father who had stood between him and a life of never-ending music and spangles and applause. A butcher and his sordid squabbles about the price of beef! — to come between him and his eluding heaven! And Lonely, deep down in his heart, determined that some day he would take it out of that butcher's son's hide, if ever he got the chance.

He tried to worm his way back through the crowd, at least to demand his ticket. But

the busy circle made short shrift of him, and his heart sank to its lowest depth as he found himself once more pushed and jostled ignominiously into the background. It was the old, old trick. Year after year he had helped water the elephants, and had run messages, and had piloted the tent-hands to the best drinking-well in all Cowansburg, and had borrowed matches for the stake-drivers — and year by year he had been fed on only empty and heart-breaking promises!

But in such a place and at such a time even sorrow like unto his could not long remain. He choked back an impotent sniffle or two, and ten minutes later was wandering in among the side-show canvases, hoping to get a gratuitous glimpse of the Fat Woman, trying to find out where the snakes were kept, taking an experimental pound at one of the big drums, speculating as to the contents of many mysterious boxes, and still vaguely asking himself if those star-decked and beautiful visions who rode on the piebald horses and the elephants really ate beefsteak and hot biscuits, the same as the common circus hands; and if, too, those winged, angel women in spotless

white gauze who dove through tissue-paper hoops and alighted so birdlike on the crupper of an Orloff stallion, really traveled in the midst of such dust and bustle and noisy profanity.

And the mad stir and bustle kept up; attendants herded back too inquisitive boys, the city of canvas grew on the air as at the touch of unseen magicians, the banners were loosed and floated with holiday flutter and abandon, the eight and ten-teamed wagons swung ponderously and prancingly out for the procession, the musicians took their seats in the great high blue-and-white band-wagon, as haughty as the deck of a Spanish galleon, and already the more knowing ones were trailing townward, to behold the full pageant at its earliest point, and as often thereafter as nimble legs and a sadly overtaxed second-wind would permit.

It was at this juncture that a sudden halt came to the proceedings. The man from the little office-wagon was seen to run over to the great blue-and-gold float of the Goddess of Liberty. La Belle Leona, the Queen of the Air, and also one of the four pages who held up the voluminous skirts of the resplendent

Goddess of the Free, had been taken ill with colic, and because of too copious draughts of brandy from the flask of Vallerita, the Sorceress of the Lion Cage, was unable to stand on firm ground, much less to retain her uncertain equilibrium upon the top of a shaking and rumbling wagon-float.

Some one suddenly caught Lonely by the shoulder, sharply, and swung him round to the float.

"Want to go on now?"

If there was a note of mockery in the question, it shot wide of Lonely's consciousness.

The boy nodded his head, for the second time too full for utterance.

"Skip in there, then, quick! They 'll fix you up!"

If the man in the derby hat had told Lonely to take his pick of all the Shetland ponies and ride off home with it, he could not have given that wide-eyed and resilient-spirited young adventurer any keener sense of bliss.

The only thorn in his rose of perfect joy was the discovery that he had to be togged up as a young woman. But already it was too late to draw back, for as he entered the many-

odored little dressing-tent, thronged with trunks and boxes and dresses and women busily engaged in flinging silver-spangled finery over their bare shoulders, Lonely was promptly seized by Cavarolla, the Queen of the Tight Rope, and as peremptorily and calmly deprived of his outer raiment as though he had been a head of lettuce being made ready for the cook-tent dinner.

Yet as nobody seemed to pay the slightest attention to his pink-skinned embarrassment, he came to perspire less by the time he had been padded out with a soiled and sadly worn pair of "symmetricals" and had thrust his bandy young legs into a pair of slack and equally soiled trunk-hose. He was then backed up and plumped down on a box, with much dispatch and energy, where he was given a generous sweep of rice powder, and a hasty dab or two of red face-paint was put on his freckled cheeks — though what make-up could ever adequately hide that nebulous runway of telltale turkey-spots!

Lonely clambered up on the great wagon as nimbly and lightly as a young monkey, where in blue-and-white draped majesty already stood

the somewhat stoutish lady who was to represent the Goddess of Liberty, who, indeed, for many and many a year had called out the lin-



THE GODDESS OF LIBERTY AND HER NEW PAGE

gering applause of all dispassionate lovers of a psychological abstraction made so substantially concrete. She was something between an angel and an enlarged Little Eva, to the

wondering eyes of her new page, whose hand trembled a little even at the thought of holding up one corner of her long and flowing skirts of blue bunting. In his other hand, happily, Lonely held a wooden battle-axe covered with faded gilding — a very necessary help to his steadiness of position, as he stood there wondering just how the Goddess had managed to get safely up on so high a wagon.

What hours and hours it seemed to the excited and impatient Lonely before the great blue-and-gold float got under way! What æons he seemed to stand blinking at the strong sunlight and shaking the gathering dust from his gorgeous trunk-hose!

But at last the ten champing teams strained on the traces, the chains rattled, the whip cracked, somewhere in the dust-hung distance a band struck up, the stocky little wheels chucked and jolted on their heavy axles, the Goddess called heatedly down for her new page not to pull the clothes off her back, the tents swam out of sight, and Lonely had begun his real, his triumphal entrance into Chamboro.

Of that triumphal tour he carried away a

never-fading and yet a rather muddled and hazy impression. He remembered the first delicious moment of his discovery when, at the corner of Barrison Street, a group of boys, known as the South River Gang, looked up wide-eyed and open-mouthed, and with sudden fierce gestures and loud cries proclaimed it was the baker's kid on the wagon. This caused them, one and all, to scramble down from their points of vantage and to trail helter-skelter after the blue-and-gold float. There could be no doubt about it! For all the stateliness and solemnity of the powdered page they could make out the bandy legs and the freckled nose — the New Boy had run away and joined the Circus!

It was a proud moment for Lonely O'Malley. And the news spread rapidly, for even before Main Street was reached, the whole Baxter Street Gang had been apprised of the wondrous fact, and at once joined the others and followed enviously at the heels of the great rocking float, debating how such a thing could ever come about, trying to feel important over the discovery, as they had done when it was found that Biff Perkins's uncle,

one of the blacksmith's strikers in the Boiler Works, knew the horse-shoer who traveled with the Sells' Circus, and on the day of the performance had drunk two glasses of beer with him and had talked about it as though it had been nothing at all!

It was in the densest crowd on Main Street that Lonely made out Annie Eliza Gubtill, clinging to her mother's hand, and for one weak yet human moment he indulged in a not inaudible titter of triumph. In fact, he turned deliberately, and bowing with that grace and ease which was an outcropping of the courtly self-complacency of his maturer days, he threw a kiss directly and unmistakably at Annie Eliza.

Something about that mottled nose and that wide and expansive smile, touched with its hungry looking mock humility, seemed strangely familiar to Annie Eliza. She looked again, and, seeing one telltale shoulder hunched, yet not more than an inch above the other, she suddenly cried out shrilly:

"Why, it's Lonely O'Malley! O-o-o-oh, it *is* Lonely O'Malley!"

And even the neglect and perfidy of other

days were forgotten in the swamping tidal-wave of pride which swept over the young lady who had once known and been faithful to Lonely. And other children heard the cry, and even the clown was overlooked, and the elephants half forgotten, and the hyenas allowed to go by with a passing glance.

But like all triumphs, its hour was brief. Prodigious and vast and unrivaled and gigantic as the circus procession had been advertised to be, it had, like all such things, to come to an end sometime. The cheering melted away, the music died down, the calliope screamed its last note, the horses were unhitched and hurried off, the wagons were dismantled, and Lonely was once more hustled down into the stuffy little dressing-tent.

Here he experienced a second qualm of rebellious anger, as he found himself seized by a stout woman in a dirty apron, and once more peeled like an orange and ordered to get into his clothes, though, indeed, — and this he saw to his secret chagrin, — the dozen busy circus-women paid no more attention to him than if he had been a little girl putting on her shoes and stockings ; so, holding that what was sauce

for the goose was sauce for the gander, he made himself more at his ease, and was interestedly and pointedly watching the half-dressed Queen of the Tight Rope inhaling cigarette smoke, when he was seized by the woman in the dirty apron, and without ceremony or apology thrust from the tent.

He made his way disconsolately about, looking for the wagon-office, in the hope that the manager's possible delight at the grace and ease with which he had filled his part as a page might induce that bluff gentleman yet to change his mind and make serious advances as to Lonely's joining the Circus for all time. He felt vaguely disturbed, for the moment, at the thought that of late he had sadly neglected his muscles, that the angle-worm oil had been applied only scantily and carelessly, and that he had never yet perfected to his own liking his new twister back-somersault.

Yet, after all the excitement and activity of the morning, he soon began to feel an emptiness in the pit of his stomach, where the inexorable clock of nature was warning him the dinner-hour must be well at hand. Just as he was debating on his course of action, a bluff

voice called to him. It was the circus manager himself.

"Here, Carrots, this is yours, I guess!"

He handed down to the startled boy a little oblong bit of pasteboard, tinted blue — the most celestial of blues, it always seemed to Lonely — and the boy remembered that it was always blue for children, red for grown-ups.

"Here, you, take a couple more!" said the man hurriedly; then he turned to speak to a passing attendant, without so much as looking at the two little pieces of blue pasteboard he was holding out for the boy to take.

Lonely shook his russet head, sadly but firmly.

In all Chamboro there was not one soul, he very well knew, who could make use of those tickets. He had not a friend in the town to bring along with him. It was useless to think of the Preacher's Son; even Annie Eliza was out of the question. His honors had come to him too late in life; he had been crowned in the hour of dissolution!

And if the man in the black derby hat had not been such a busy and preoccupied person-

age, he might have taken a second and longer look at the sad-eyed urchin who refused, and actually turned away from a circus ticket.

It was wonderful, however, what a hurried though substantial dinner did for Lonely's blighted hopes, broken heart, and altogether wasted life. He slipped out of the back door, wiping the crumbs from his still masticating mouth. There, as he hurried out to feed his new brindled pup, answering to the name of Shivers, and procured through the transfer of a hunting-knife and three shares in his new air-ship when completed, he caught a fleeting glimpse of Lionel Clarence, escaping from the parsonage for one last despairing study of the ever-assuaging and yet ever-inflammatory circus poster, on the back of the Barrisons' barn.

Lonely reimprisoned Shivers under the inverted baby-carriage body, where he was forced to make his new home pending the growth of those stronger ties which were to bind him equally to Homer and Gilead. Then the boy cut after the escaping Preacher's son.

Lionel Clarence, when the other boy joined him, was shaking his head with gloomy cynicism over the highly-colored panorama.

"All that is n't true!" declared the Preacher's son. "I just don't believe they ever could do those things, and have all those animals!"

After all, thought Lonely, there were worse fates than his. What if destiny had foredoomed him to life in a parsonage, and collars and long hair!

"Why, ain't you goin'?" asked the baker's son, loftily, incredulously.

Again Lionel Clarence shook his head.

"Mother said I might, perhaps,—but father decided it would n't look right, you know!"

"Who cares for looks!" cried Lonely, anarchistically, spitting through his teeth.

Lionel Clarence sighed heavily. A gentle little glow suffused Lonely's diaphragm.

"Why don't you just pike out by yourself, same as me? Just mosey off and take it in, and then rub some resin and horse-hairs on, if you 've *got* to get a lickin'?"

He felt truly sorry for Lionel Clarence.

"Are *you* goin'?" asked the Preacher's son, rapturously.

"Cert!" said the laconic Lonely, spitting again, the same as a tent-hand might.

"Will you tell me things — when you get back?"

The glow in Lonely's midriff was mounting to an intensity always ominous. Yet he decided to take his time about it, and enjoy the taste of the situation to the full.

He drew closer to the other boy with his heels well planted apart.

"Want to come?" he asked at last, casually.

"Right into the main show?"

"Of course! Right in!"

"Would n't we have to hook in?" parried the Preacher's son, infected by the other boy's spirit of adventure.

"Nope!" said Lonely, secretly feeling for his blue ticket.

"But where would *we* ever get half a dollar?" almost wailed Lionel Clarence. The O'Reillys, he knew, had sold their cook-stove so that the family might attend the performance *en bloc;* but the O'Reillys were lazy, improvident, and shiftless, a blot on the fair name of Chamboro.

Lonely smiled loftily. He flipped the blue ticket carelessly, contemptuously, disdainfully, into the other boy's lap.

"Go on, and have some fun," he cried, grandly. "I could have got half a dozen for you, if you 'd only said something about it!"

And he looked offended and hurt at the thought of such an oversight on the part of the Preacher's son. This latter youth was already peering cautiously about him, to see if the coast was clear for swift and speedy escape.

"How—how did you ever get it, Lonely?" he gasped.

"Get it?—why, I always get 'em, when I want 'em! You 'll see me in with another this afternoon!" he boasted recklessly, with little thought for the future.

Then, as Lionel Clarence shook himself together, Lonely cautioned him to be sure to get his seat up close to the band, even calling after the other boy, as he began to scurry and scramble across back lots, that he himself might drop in and meet him there, sometime after the show started.

. . . .

Alone, making his hot and dusty way out to the circus grounds, without his ticket and without money, Lonely experienced that chill-

ing reaction which always came in the wake of one of his "grand moments." Three times he was swept forlornly past the ticket-seller, without so much as catching the eye of his old-time friend; twice he was driven wrathfully and promptly outside the ropes. And time was flying. The crowd grew smaller, the shadows grew a little longer, the draught-horses placidly munched their hay, the sound of muffled music crept out through the rippling canvas. The Grand Entry had begun.

Lonely circled the long, well-guarded ring of tent-stakes, broken, humiliated, thrice chastened, and yet for all his outward aimlessness, still tense of nerve and alert of eye.

On the sunny southwest side of the great tent he crawled in under the line of huddled, heavy wagons, now empty and dismal looking, left waiting there for their midnight loads.

Lonely had suddenly noticed that the guard who patrolled this sunniest and hottest side of the tent every now and then mopped his face with a huge red handkerchief.

He most carefully and guardedly watched for his chance, — which came and went with

each mopping motion. The next time the red bandanna went up to the perspiring brow there was the flash of a hurrying figure between the back wagon wheels and the tent wall, the twinkle of a pair of dusty feet as this shadow



THE RED BANDANNA WENT UP

dove adroitly in under the waving canvas, and no sign of intrusion or disturbance as the uniformed guard walked past the spot, twirling his stick as he went.

Lonely, in the grassy gloom within, lay still for a moment, under a bank of humanity-packed seats, cautiously looking about him

for an opening in the serried avenues of feet before him.

It took him but a short while to discover several, whereupon he did his best to make a hurried but minute character study of his possible neighbors, in so far as such a study could be carried on with nothing more than the several pairs of feet which dangled before or above him.

He decided, at last, in favor of what was a rotund and comfortable-looking country-woman of about forty, deciding that here was a pair of feet on which he could pin his faith and his future.

Then he thrust his russet head through the two green boards which made up the tiers of seats, and clambered and twisted nimbly up into the vacant place.

The stout country-woman uttered a startled, "Lord bless my soul!" and peered down at Lonely, in not unnatural wonder. The youth on his other side looked envious, for there is no hero like unto the hero who can hook into a circus.

Lonely smiled up at the stout country-woman with his most winning and wistful

smile, shot through with wordless melancholy, and was deciding that all was well, when he noticed one of the clowns, dressed up as a "country jake" and having great fun with the later arrivals who sought for seats, whispering to a uniformed guard just inside the ring, and unmistakably pointing at him.

As the guard made his way in through the half-dozen crowded rows, Lonely promptly and inspiredly decided on his course of action.

"Come out o' that, you!" the guard shouted angrily at the boy.

"Me?" said the pensive and placid-looking Lonely.

"Yes, you! You stole in here! Come on!"

Lonely put a calm and trusting face up to the stout woman breathing somewhat heavily at his side.

"Why, maw, I come in with you, did n't I, maw?"

The country-woman breathed still more heavily, for a pregnant second or two, and Lonely smiled sleepily, although he knew at that very second that his fate hung nicely in the balance of blind chance.

But he had not altogether erred in his

choice of a colleague. She flushed purple, to the roots of her well-frizzed hair (though whether from rage or from mere maidenhood modesty Lonely could never decide), and looking straight at the big guard she said:

"Why, of course you did, Willie! and I'd like to see that big brute lay a finger on you!"

And there were sudden cries of "Sit down!" and "Down in front!" and as the guard drew back and the end of the Grand Parade brought a sudden influx of spectators, Lonely seized the occasion to slip away and migrate to more settled quarters.

He found the open-mouthed and entranced Lionel Clarence, huddled up as close to the bass-drum as he could get, at one moment rocking and weeping tears of mirth over the introductory antics of the clowns and at the next gazing rapturously up at the crimson-clad La Belle Leona, little dreaming that the dust-stained boy at his side had that very morning worn the tights which now gyrated and twinkled so perilously high up on the swinging trapezes.

And Lonely even forgot to tell about it, as

he settled back triumphantly in his hard seat, and under the heated, odorous, mysterious, enchanting dome of rippling canvas, watched the airy and nymph-like Cavarolla prance daintily out on her tight-rope.

So many dreams must fail us, Dear,
So many Springs to Autumn turn,
That you and I, slow year by year,
The wisdom of our youth unlearn, —
That stranger wisdom when to me
You seemed a golden butterfly
Who all your careless life should be
A child of Earth's too open sky.

CHAPTER V

In which the King comes into his own

LONELY awoke, the morning after the Show, dreaming that he was leading the circus procession, on a white horse decked out with a saddle-cloth of gold and wearing ostrich plumes above its ears. He had just ordered the red-and-white clown not to make faces at Annie Eliza, when a piercing scream came from that young woman of unmatched loveliness, who sat on a white stool in the snake-cage, with languid serpents coiled and twined about her spangled hips. For somebody had fed chewing-tobacco to the snakes, and they had gone mad, and were squeezing their mistress to death, squeezing her until she grew visibly longer foot by foot, before Lonely's very eyes. The town constable and the fire brigade came rushing up to effect her rescue. But Lonely waved them aside, and with one hand on his hip, and amid thunderous cheering, entered the cage, and blinded the snakes by putting mustard in their eyes. After which he

beheaded them, one by one, and poured red lemonade over the snake-lady, who promptly came to, and cried over him, and amid more cheering presented him with twelve chocolate mice, which he was most woefully anxious to eat before the sun melted them.

And all of this seemed natural and decorous to the wakening Lonely, for he was invariably the hero of his own dreams, and as invariably came off with flying colors — except when he ate too many green things and thereby suffered from colic and nightmare. In fact, Lonely was debating whether or not to accept the snake-lady's offer of marriage, when he fully awoke and found himself half out of bed and his mother calling in to him that Gilead had broken out and was in the Gubtills' garden again.

Such a dream, Lonely felt, was augury of an auspicious day. And, in fact, he had scarcely eaten the second canal through his plateful of corn-meal mush — Lonely always ate his porridge first into two canals, and a lake in the middle, just as he always made animals when he poured his molasses over it at first — when some one whistled and hey-ohed to him over the back fence.



SHE 'LL TACKLE ANYTHING FROM A TOM-CAT TO A TERRIER

This was a proceeding so unusual that he only half finished his breakfast, and hurried forth to discover Dode Johnson awaiting him in the alley, with a raccoon in a little lath-barred dog-kennel.

The two boys looked at each other; no words passed between them, and yet each spoke in a language older and plainer than words.

"Hello!" said Dode, timidly.

"Hello!" answered Lonely, tentatively.

"Wonderin' if you wanted to buy a coon?" the other boy began.

It was only one of the polite conventions of all such circles, and as such the other boy accepted and understood it.

"Tame, or fightin'?" he asked, casually.

"Fightin'! She'll tackle anything from a tom-cat to a terrier! Lend her to you if you like!"

"I'm afraid Pop'd kick — he says he's goin' to shoot my goat, if I don't get shut of it pretty soon."

By this time the ice had been broken, and Dode was plying Lonely with questions about the Show. These Lonely responded to magnanimously, though with some hauteur, for he began to see that things had changed for him, and that the taint of the Outlander was now wiped away. Yet Lonely could not look upon the owner of the raccoon as a representative chief; he was too youthful and small of stature to be accepted as Chamboro's hostage of concession. And there were old scores to be wiped out.

It was a good two hours later, when Lonely was in the midst of his regular Saturday morning task of washing down the bake-shop windows, that the entire town gang hove in sight, jingling the earliest pocket-money of the season after assisting, at the rate of a penny a box, in gathering the first harvest from Old Sam Kettlewell's strawberry patches.

The usual spirit of abandon, peculiar to such occasions, did not hang over the scattered little berry-stained crowd as it drifted nearer the bakery. They drew up on the opposite side of the street, outwardly impassive, yet doubly ominous because of this seeming unconcern.

Although some of the younger boys showed signs of yielding to the eternal allurement of the little show-window, they were promptly and mutteringly restrained by their elders, who ranged themselves along the sidewalk and continued to stare impassively at the New Boy. And the New Boy, to the careless eye, still seemed absorbed in washing down his window-panes. Yet none of the signs and portents from over the way were lost on Lonely, whose heart, if the truth must be told, was almost in his mouth, while his knees more and more

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showed signs of a most unseemly and unheroic shakiness. For there was one thing which Lonely could not abide, and that was suspense. Once well in the heat of a fight, he could rush on to the end, blind and reckless; once having flung himself upon the turgid stream of opposition, he could battle exultantly on to the last breath. It was the stillness before the plunge, the squeamish hesitation and meditation upon the brink, which was so odious to his young soul. To this, later in life, might indeed be traced many of his misfortunes, little and big.

But still there was no advance from the gang, now not thirty paces away. There remained to Lonely only one tattered shred of consolation, through all that miserable length of suspense. That was the consciousness that he had at last shown himself to be worthy of their envy and their steel. He knew that now he could get all the fighting he wanted.

But he also knew that another minute of this sort of suspense and uncertainty would surely send him bolting into the little bakeshop, a coward and a fugitive.

So he did what seemed a most heroic thing,

but what was, at heart, the very flowering of arrant cowardice, springing as it did from his sheer terror of all indetermination.

He turned, and with a passionate little swear-word, let fly his rubber window-cleaner, straight into the thick of the storm-cloud which refused to let forth its bolt on him.

There was a second of nimble scrambling aside, and the iron-shod rubber hit with a resounding thud on the fence-boards beyond.

Then the storm-cloud flashed forth its lightning. This it did in the form of Piggie Brennan, for two long years the leader of the town gang, the well-tested and duly accredited king and chief of his little tribe.

Being already coatless, he paid sufficient tribute to tradition by flinging down his well-frayed straw hat, and walking directly and savagely over to where Lonely awaited his coming. It was plain that this was not to be the mere shuffle and bluster of the every-day boy fight.

"I kin lick you!" said Piggie, with profound and purposeful conviction.

"Then get at it!" cried Lonely, as he put up his guard and wondered whether or not the

fisticuffs with him, not only teaching him how to feint, and guard, and uppercut, and deliver half-arm jabs, but also giving him copious and exhaustive lessons in how to stand punishment as an O'Malley ought. These lessons in time became so trying to the pupil that his frightened mother often hid the willing enough Lonely under the bed, and wept in secret on those unhappy days when he was found and dragged forth. Nor did the boy care for fighting; the only thing that appealed to him was the intoxicating sense of delight and pride which crept through him, like wine, or the very ichor of the gods, when he found himself face to face with success. No sop was too small for his Cerberus of self-glory, so that when he did fight he liked best to fight before a crowd, effecting, if possible, a dramatic dénouement and an even more dazzling finale. And nothing, of course, could be further removed than this from true heroism. Added to this, Lonely was the possessor of a sadly ungovernable temper, when pressed beyond certain bounds, and, what was even worse, he had long fed on the pomp and glory of leadership in his old-time village of Cowansburg.

"Does kickin' go?" Piggie breathlessly demanded of his following, as he guarded and wheeled about after the still gyrating Lonely.

"Nope," said Redney McWilliams for the crowd, seeing that the New Boy was barefooted. One day earlier in his career, and Lonely would never have been treated with this untoward consideration. But a boy who had been a part of the Circus, for even an hour, was something to take seriously.

Lonely realized that such a decision on so mooted a point was a favor to him, — and it was a feather in his cap of vanity.

"Let him kick, the saphead! I can lick him, kickin' and all!" he cried, magnificently, as he saw the heavy blows of Piggie fall short of his own alert little back-jerks.

Piggie's answer to this airy concession was a prompt and stinging kick on the shin-bone, for as a kicker the butcher's son was a finished artist. The sharp pain of this brought the New Boy to his senses. He gave over his bantam-cock antics, and closed hotly in on his adversary. Then the fight began in dead earnest.

But over this old and unlovely scene of two young savages pounding and tearing at one

another tooth and nail let us draw the curtain. All boyhood, it is true, is sternly competitive; all boyhood is an eternal arena for the testing of muscle and wit. But life's sternest battles, alas, are not fought with fists. So why describe the sparring and dodging and rolling and twisting, the gasping and puffing and writhing?

Suffice it to record that Lonely, feeling still confident of his powers, beheld Annie Eliza emerge timidly from her gate, and fearing the fray might end before her arrival on the field of action, held off for a temporizing moment or two. His reward for this was a prodigious punch on the nose, which, naturally enough, started that organ bleeding profusely, and through the tears that it brought to his eyes, sadly interfered with his sight. This fact Piggie took immediate advantage of, with three quickly repeated home-thrusts. Lonely, under these, felt his cold, pitiless purpose suddenly buried beneath a shower of falling stars. He struck out blindly and wildly; he felt the blows still raining mercilessly in on him; he made a last grim effort to land one of his often-vaunted Cowansburg upper-cuts, utterly failed in this,

leaving an opening which even the well-winded Piggie could not resist. The next moment, consumed by a sudden passion to escape, to collect his wits and gather his wind once more, Lonely turned and fled, — fled incontinently to the bake-shop door, beaten, bleeding, humiliated, chased in over his own threshold by the surprised and exultant Piggie Brennan.

Lonely's flour-covered father, with a great pan of loaves on his shoulder, came in from the bake-oven just as his offspring came in from the street.

Blood streamed from the boy's discolored and swollen nose; his body was convulsed with fierce and passionate little sobs.

"And what's the meanin' o' this?" cried Lonely's father, as he eyed his offspring, coldly, up and down.

"That b—big b — b — bully out there licked me!" wailed Lonely, trying in vain to stanch the ruddy flow which was making sad havoc of his blue checked shirt.

"Who — what bully?" cried Timothy O'Malley, dangerously, coming out of the gloom toward the front of the shop.

"Piggie Brennan — that — that great big

fat boy there!" sobbed the defeated warrior, quakingly pointing out the victor.

"That little runt — that miserable undersized puddin'-head? Now you get out and lick the daylight out o' that kid, or I'll lick the daylight out o' *you!*"

"I can't do it, Pop!" wailed the New Boy, miserably.

"Git at him, or I'll whale the life out o' you!"

He opened the door, and reached down, in a rage, for his oven poker.

Lonely shot through the door, as from a cannon, and all but knocked Annie Eliza over as he went. It so happened that Piggie was minutely and proudly explaining just how he had effected the final blow, when the sheer terror-born momentum of Lonely's flying body caught him fairly in the pit of the stomach.

It was so unlooked-for, so undreamed-of, that the crowd dropped back aghast. Even Piggie's jaw fell at the sight of the drawn and gory and desperate face before him.

"I'm goin' to *kill* you now!" Lonely screamed at him, and in the very abandon of

utter despair he flung his weary body upon the still open-mouthed victor.

The New Boy paused only long enough to know that Annie Eliza was looking on, to re-



THAT BIG BULLY OUT THERE LICKED ME

member that his father was watching him from the shop-window, to warn himself that this was his last and only chance.

Piggie promptly and effectively swung out with his long right arm, but Lonely took the

blow with joy, and jumped in for more, half crooning and half wailing as he fought.

It was a fight the like of which had never been witnessed in all Chamboro before.[1] It went down in the annals of the town, along with the drowning accidents, and the big fire, and the wrecking of the Minnie Steiner on the bridge abutment.

It lasted until the gasping and still astounded Piggie Brennan found himself with only one eye to see out of, with a loose tooth and a grotesquely swollen lip, with a sore body and a swimming head, held determinedly down in the street-dust while a shrill and altogether insane young voice cried over him, —

[1] That our poor hero had, alas, a taint of venality in his veins is further borne out by the family tradition of a fight of his, years before, with an aggressive and overbearing country cousin, who, indeed, pommelled Lonely unmercifully. The defeated one, however, on being offered twenty-five cents and half a watermelon by a purposeful maiden aunt, returned to the fray, as in the Piggie Brennan encounter, and soundly and unexpectedly trounced the bully. The only thing Lonely remembered, or cared to remember, about it, was that he ate the half-watermelon, and strutted around the rest of the morning with the shell of it on his head.

"Had enough? 'Nough?" — punctuating each query with a too well-directed fist.

And when Piggie, in a muffled and gasping voice, confessed that he had had enough, Lionel Clarence, who had arrived on the scene just in time to see the finishing stroke, being eager to exhibit his recently acquired prowess, audaciously challenged Piggie himself, while Lonely continued to limp up and down in front of the speechless gang, shrilly and drunkenly demanding that some one step forth and fight with him.

This no one seemed willing to do, even after Lonely's individual challenges, carefully repeated up and down the line. So the New Boy stepped to the sidewalk, and turned to his new-made fiefs with a sudden grandly impatient sweep of the arm.

"Now move on, you kids, while I finish my job here!"

At which off-hand yet dramatic climax the scattered little cluster of boys moved off and melted away, while Annie Eliza dutifully brought back Lonely his rubber window-cleaner. That trembling youth, with a smeared but happy grin through the glass at his not altogether displeased parent, waited only for

solitude before escaping to the cool assuagement of the back-yard pump.

Yet history would be false to record this as the end of the combat. For Piggie's wounds rankled in his memory, and two days later, as he stood in the doorway of his father's meat-shop, he beheld Lonely weighed down with a clothes-basket heaped with bread, — the faithful Plato having developed an unlooked-for attack of the blind staggers.

Piggie accepted this as the opportunity of a lifetime, and as the baker's son walked by in his innocent and unsuspecting pride of superiority, Piggie, in the security of his own home circle, swung vigorously out and soundly kicked his late conqueror.

Lonely dropped the basket, and made for his assailant. That youth, who had felt so well protected by the shadowing wing of the parental roof, fled into the store. It so chanced that his father was busy in the refrigerator, at the moment, though it is doubtful if even the elder Brennan could have stopped Lonely's fiery pursuit. Seeing himself helpless there, Piggie bolted for the stairway which led up to the Brennan place of residence, immediately

above the shop. Up these stairs Lonely still pursued the fleeing Piggie, through the dining-room, and into Mrs. Brennan's own bedroom, where the fugitive was finally seized on and



INNOCENT AND UNSUSPECTING

soundly pommelled, after which he was led downstairs by the forelock of his tumbled and

frowsled hair, where he was not only made to gather up the scattered loaves of bread, but was ordered to purloin from the parental counter a generous slice of Bologna sausage, which Lonely consumed placidly and with much zest, as he made his rounds.

In fact, it must be confessed that Piggie through this incident became the victim of continuous and ever-increasing extortion, at the hands of Lonely and Lionel Clarence alike, until Mr. Sampson, looking into the matter of his son's too frequently occurring dietetic disturbances, wrung from the culprit a complete confession, and later had a serious talk with Butcher Brennan on the matter.

And in this ironically and secretly ignominious way the King of Cowansburg came into his own once more, from that day on being reckoned, either openly or tacitly, as the leader of the town gang.

It seems so long ago that we
Across the years forget,
And wake, and still remember not —
So long ago, and yet
Across those outland April hills
Youth's thousand voices seem
To call still past the bars of Birth,
The barriers of Dream!

CHAPTER VI

In which Lionel Clarence makes his escape

"I BELIEVE there is something *good* about that boy!" said Mrs. Sampson, with conviction.

"He 's the most finished type of pagan I ever clapped eyes on!" answered the Reverend Ezra Sampson, with equal conviction.

"But after all, the boy's heart 's in the right place," protested the mother.

"Which can seldom be said of his body! Mehetabel Wilkins tells me that he comes and tortures her daily, hanging by his toes from the big maple in front of her house."

"But what harm does that do Mehetabel?"

"It 's all the boy's artfully contrived punishment, for impounding his goat. She tells me that it 's slowly driving her crazy, the awful sight of that boy swinging up there by his two toes, head down. She even offered him a fishing-pole of split bamboo and a custard pie, if he would stop."

"Yes, he *is* pagan!" sighed the mother.

"And always will be," added the Preacher, remembering certain shrugs and gestures with which Lonely had resented a late attempt at timely guidance and advice.

"I would give a great deal to know what will grow in that weed-garden of idleness twenty years from now!" said the Preacher's wife. And she sighed again.

"He's so like a wild animal, — as soon as he sees a door close on him he starts to fret and fidget," she went on.

"Yes, and his barbarian young soul hates restraint just the same as his barbarian young body!" added the man of the cloth. Only that morning Mrs. Sampson and Lonely had been closeted together in the sewing-room; there she had made a patient and serious effort to get somewhere near the heart of the abashed boy. Yet when any approach was made to the matter of his general morality and the higher life of the spirit, Lonely only squirmed and squinted, or hunched up one shoulder and listened meekly to the end. So Mrs. Sampson had been forced to go back to the original object of the conversation, the unsatisfactory

condition of Lionel Clarence's health and his sudden untoward fretfulness. Old Doctor Ridley, in fact, had suggested that Lionel Clarence be taken away from his books for a few months, and be made to knock around and rough it a bit. And surely, thought Mrs. Sampson, as she put the reluctant Lonely through his catechism, here was a child who held the key to rough and rugged health.

"I could do something with him, mebbe," confessed Lonely, with airy condescension, "if you'd only get them curls o' his cut off!"

"And you would try to stand an example to my boy?"

"Sure," said Lonely, eagerly. "I'd learn him tumblin' and slack-wire work in less 'n a week!"

"Do you still smoke, Lonely?"

"'Most every day," answered the boy, truthfully. "Got to do it, swimmin'-time, to keep down fever and ague!"

"But surely that is bad for you?"

"Yep, *cane* is — turns your blood into water! I go in for grapevine, mostly, with punk for swimmin' days!"

Once more the mother of Lionel Clarence sighed helplessly.



"Do you fight?"

"I 've quit fightin', in this town!" answered Lonely, the scarred and victorious, an Alexander with no more worlds to conquer.

And although the outcome of their private talk was somewhat uncertain, and the most that she could report to her husband was "That he at least lives up to his barbarian code," she finally decided that Lionel Clarence should be handed over to the temporal care of Lonely.



SHOT DOWN HIS QUARRY

The New Boy entered into his tutorship with such pride and enthusiasm that Lionel Clarence's mother still again protested there was something good about the boy, and in her gratitude of heart overfed him on jelly-roll and ginger cookies.

Her first qualm of doubt came unexpectedly, a day or two later, when she was quietly and busily picking green currants for a deep-river pie.

Seeing an unexpected stir and movement at the back of the garden, she peered circumspectly through the bush, and there beheld Lonely, with drawn bow and arrow, calmly stalking one of her Silver Dorking hens. She saw him shadow the mildly protesting fowl from bush to bush, and when at last a favorable chance offered, deliberately take aim and shoot down his quarry. Before she could quite recover from her astonishment, the boy had seized the stunned chicken, promptly wrung its neck, and disappeared with it, through the hole in the back fence. That Lionel Clarence later joined in the dance about the pot, and made away with more than half of the carcass, and vowed it was the finest chicken

he had ever eaten, were facts which, naturally enough, were never revealed to Mrs. Sampson.

Lionel Clarence, however, was not destined to remain long under the dubious guardianship of Lonely O'Malley. His fretfulness increased, his usually abnormal appetite fell away, he complained of headache and sore throat, and when old Doctor Ridley was finally sent for it was only too plain to that assuager of Chamboro's ills that the boy was suffering from a well-developed attack of measles.

Lionel Clarence's Grandmother Horton was hurriedly sent for, and came post-haste to Chamboro to help in the nursing. The house was kept dark and quiet, and Lonely, pending the closing of school for the summer holidays, found this second solitude weigh heavily on his exuberant young soul.

The newly arrived grandmother, indeed, would not even allow Lonely on the premises, and daily reported that Lionel Clarence's fever was worse, and flurried and worried about, drawing blinds, and issuing orders, and demanding silence. And Lionel, imprisoned in his hot and stuffy little room, looked petulantly

out at the dreamy blue sky, and heard the play-cries and the street sounds, and hunted for cool spots on his pillow, and whined and cried a great deal, and devoutly wished that after all he had run off with the circus and been a pink lemonade man.

. . . .

It was a hot and cloudless day in June. The tree-tops stirred lazily, the bees droned murmurously about Chamboro's empty gardens, the shadows stood flat and black on the almost deserted streets of the little town.

Lonely could stand it no longer. He securely tied Shivers, so as not to be followed, and then, making a wide détour, noiselessly and circumspectly entered the Sampson garden by way of the well-known hole in the back fence.

Under the shadow of the pear-tree he whistled three times. Receiving no answer to this summons, he gave vent to a muffled owl-hoot, pregnant, stirring, unmistakable.

A moment later a languid head was thrust out of a carefully curtained window, and Lionel Clarence was whistling down at him, weakly but gleefully. He was in his white

night-gown, and there was an ice-bag bound about his flushed forehead.

"Sick?" asked Lonely, with fine superfluity.

"Sick o' staying cooped up here," said Lionel Clarence, wrathfully, with considerably more energy than Lonely had looked for.

Now one of the keenest disappointments of Lonely's life had always been the fact that he was not afflicted with some great and incurable malady.[1] During all the first part of the small-fruit season he firmly argued with himself that he had consumption, often not being able to take a deep breath without pain, and often feeling with gratified concern about what he deemed the lobe of his left lung, a good two inches below the waist-line. At other times, especially after swallowing countless cherry-stones for the delectation of two entranced country cousins, he decided that his threatened ailment was one of the heart, and against the

[1] Once, on going to visit his Grandmother Lomely for the first time, he had sought to overcome this drawback by walking with a persistent and pathetic limp, for one whole week of dissimulation wantonly and passionately adhering to the statement that he had been a lifelong sufferer from hip disease.

day of his sudden and untimely death prepared a long and elaborate list of benefactions, disposing of everything from his new invention for making clay marbles[1] to a box-kite

[1] The following is a partial list of Lonely's several inventions:

An improved water-wheel, to be used for operating churns, sewing-machines, etc. The power was usually carried in through an open window, by means of a light clothes-line, running rather spasmodically over many spool-pulleys. When not attached to anything, both water-wheel and power-line and spool-pulleys spun and rattled away bravely enough; but the invention was never seriously adopted by purblindly conservative grown-ups, so was diverted to rotating a home-made wind-mill which otherwise refused to turn without the aid of water and wind combined. A pair of flannel shoes for Stumpy, Annie Eliza's lame hen, deprived of her toes through frost-bite. While usually placid and companionable, Stumpy, when shod, undeviatingly hid in the lilac bushes and sulked.

An Eolipile motor, made of two oil-cans mounted on trunnions, with a small boiler attached. Though of no great industrial value, Lonely took the greatest pride in this little engine, in which he imagined lay embodied some key to the reformation of all steam power. His sorrow knew no bounds, accordingly, when he discovered that a scribe named Hero of Alexandria had minutely described his engine, one hundred and fifty years before the Christian Era.

A dog-harness and cultivator, to expedite the hoeing and weeding of kitchen-gardens, etc. As no dogs sufficiently

which had been reputed to be the strongest "puller" in all Chamboro.

So he gazed up at Lionel Clarence envi-

amenable to discipline could ever be found, to operate this really excellent implement, it fell into disuse.

An improved cannon, made of brass pump-cylinder, mounted on two barrow-wheels. Powder sufficient for its proper loading and discharge had never been secured.

A new and greatly improved method of making Angle-Worm Oil — long looked upon as the most effectual lubricant for all intending circus performers. Its only drawback was its over-pungent odor.

An automatic "bite-announcer" (for use while fishing for mud-cat), made of an old tortion spring, with a slight bell attached. When stuck upright in a stump or dock-crack, it warns the most sleepy-headed fisherman just when to pull in his line.

A rotating kite-messenger.

A new form of bullet-mould, especially adapted for Indian warfare.

A new and improved method of fastening on Indian Feathers — of naturally restricted commercial value.

And last, but by no means least, a Flying-Machine, made of bamboo fishing-poles, umbrella canes, many old linen sheets, numberless strings and pulleys and springs, and always awaiting just one last pulley or brace or bolt to be finished and perfect. It seems scarcely necessary to add that this Flying-Machine and its over-sanguine maker had many falls in common, mostly from the tops of straw-stacks and stables.

ously, wondering why luck should be so against him..

"Been having any fun?" asked the patient, wistfully.

"Swimmin', and all that!" answered Lonely.

Lionel Clarence made a clicking sound, with his tongue against the roof his mouth, which was meant to convey his poignant appreciation of such joys, as well as his regret that they were now beyond his reach.

He leaned further out of the window, pulling off the ice-bag as he looked down.

"S'pose you gettin' lots of jelly and stuff?" asked Lonely, cheeringly.

The patient shook his head sorrowfully.

"They 're half starving me up here!" he declared, with rising wrath.

Lonely took his turn at head-wagging, sympathetically.

"And shut up in this poke of a room all day!" lamented the invalid.

"You don't look so sick!" said Lonely.

"I don't believe I *am!*" said Lionel Clarence, slowly, and with some mysterious inward illumination.

He wriggled still further out into the air of

freedom, looked cautiously about him, and then said with great determination:

"I 'm going to hook away from here! I 'm all hot and sticky and itchy, and *I 'm going to have a swim!*"

The other boy half-heartedly warned him back, yet, even while telling him that it was a pretty bad thing to be sick, enlarging vividly and enthusiastically on the beautiful warmth of the water of late, and the new spring-board the gang had put up over the diving-hole.

The natural outcome of their talk was that Lonely meekly obeyed Lionel Clarence's reckless and imperious order to put the ladder up to the window, and while this was being done he himself was poking a pair of wobbly legs into his Sunday velvet trousers.

Then he rolled up the bed-rug, and, along with one of the pillows, thrust it artfully down between the sheets, so that when covered at the top with a handkerchief and ice-bag, it would take a second glance to discover that the muffled bundle was not really a sleeping patient.

This done, he crept carefully down the

ladder, which was later restored to its place by the driving-shed, and in two minutes more was following closely on Lonely's heels in a short cut for the swimming-hole.

The breeze had died down, the noonday sun was at its hottest, the river lay shadowy and limpid and alluring. Lonely's heels had already flashed up in the air and disappeared into the quiet depths just under the new diving-board, and the feel of the shallower water to Lionel Clarence's tentative foot was both mildly cool and cogently alluring.

"Do you think I 'd better, Lonely?" he asked, with his mind already made up. The other boy shook the water from his russet hair, just emerged from touching bottom, grunted, turned easily on his back, and floated there luxuriously, now and then emitting from between his pursed-up lips a little fountain-like jet of sparkling water.

"Do you think I 'd better risk it?" repeated Lionel Clarence, already up to his knees.

"'Course; come on — may as well have the game as the name, now you 're here!" and Lonely lay there motionless, blinking placidly up at the strong sunlight.

The sick boy took his "duck" with a gasp, recovered his balance, and struck out for midstream with that loose-jointed vigor peculiar to the beginner.

"*Is n't* it great!" he gasped, as he made his way through the buoyant and limpid coolness, as near to the glory of flying as mortals are allowed to come. He clambered up on the old black-walnut root in the middle of the river, and there sunned himself contentedly, with his thin young legs swaying gently back and forth in the stream.

There Lonely whiled the time away giving exhibitions of the many fashions of water-travel. He showed Lionel Clarence the awkward and archaic "cow-fashion," and then the methodical, spatty, business-like overhand stroke that went by the name of "sailor-fashion," then he showed what "steamboat-fashion" meant, lying well out on the top of the water, and churning it foamy with his quick heel-strokes. Then he "laid his hair," first on one side, then on the other, then exactly in the middle.

Whereupon the sick boy said the sun was too hot for him, and slipped down into the



"DO YOU THINK I'D BETTER RISK IT?"

coolness again, where he declared that every bit of itchiness went out of his skin, that he felt all hunky-dory there, and that he was even game for a handicap race back to shore.

Back in the shallows once more, they had the most glorious of water-fights, smiting the smooth surface with the heel of their hands, and sending it rattling like buck-shot upon one another's streaming head and shoulders. Then, at Lonely's timely suggestion, both fell to smoking punk, earnestly and assiduously, to guard against any possible attack of fever and ague.

And just about the precise time that Lionel Clarence was being initiated into the mysteries of the back-dive, his zealous and solicitous grandmother, having fanned his supposedly sleeping face for a good hour and more, came to the conclusion that the patient was over-sleeping himself, and must promptly be fed.

So, having ordered up his broth and lime-water, she hesitatingly gave a gentle little shake to the patient, who straightway fell apart in her astounded hand. There she held what most certainly seemed to her a dis-membered grandson, at arm's length, catching

her breath hysterically, and battling several minutes for air, before she could call for help.

A hurried search was made. But the patient was not to be found. The household was aroused, Leena was sent helter-skelter off for Doctor Ridley, and the search was extended to the outbuildings and the garden.

By this time word had flown about that the Preacher's son had made his escape, in delirium, and a sudden little wave of commotion swept through the slumberous town. All business came to a standstill; searching parties were hurriedly formed, while every nook and corner of the Sampson household was being looked over and over, ineffectually, for the third and fourth time.

It was old Captain Steiner who reported that he had seen two boys in the river, just above the swimming-hole, and thereby caused a precipitous migration across commons and vacant lots and hay-fields, down to the shadowy river-bank, where nearly all Chamboro arrived, just in time to see the presumably delirious Lionel Clarence take a neat back-dive off the spring-board.

"It's—it's my Lionel Clarence, flinging himself in!"

The lad's father went pale, as he broke into a run, and pantingly called back to old Doctor Ridley, puffing at his heels, the startling news that his son could not swim a stroke. Yet a moment later they saw the newly shorn head emerge from the water, saw the confident stroke and the business-like splutter from the lips. They both stopped speechless on the brink of the swimming-hole, scarcely able to believe their eyes, still too consumed with conflicting emotions to speak.

Lonely, who had caught sight of the advancing army from a distance, had taken a discreet long dive downstream, then another and another; and coming up under a canopy of wild grapevines, had scrambled ashore and secreted himself in the uppermost boughs of a leafy willow.

There he remained, squinting out at the sudden hub-bub, wondering if they would find the clothes he had *cached* in a hollow log, to escape the danger of "chawing beef" at the hands of the Upper River gang and the men from the Tile Works, who had the habit of not



DICTATING A TRUCE

only tying small boys' shirts into tight knots, but of soaking them in water and pounding the knots with stones, to insure each already tenacious knot against easy undoing.

And Lionel Clarence, finding himself so dramatically discovered, wisely and doggedly swam out to midstream, where he mounted the black-walnut root, and where he remained until a truce was made and his own terms were finally agreed upon.

Leena and Lionel Clarence's grandmother were crying audibly, by this time, declaring it would all be the death of the boy, and pleading for some one to plunge in and rescue the poor lad before it was too late.

But old Doctor Ridley pulled up his coat-sleeve, and thrust his hand down into the water of the swimming-hole.

"Tut, tut!" he exclaimed. "It 's as warm as new milk!"

And he established a dangerous precedent in Chamboro therapeutics by publicly attesting that it would n't do the boy a bit of harm, and that he was vastly mistaken, indeed, if it would n't cool his fever off a bit.

So Lionel Clarence, having been induced to paddle ashore, as the women in the searching party discreetly withdrew, was carefully muffled up in a lap-robe, and driven home in the Barrisons' phaeton.

He was plied with many questions as to what had possessed him to run away in that fashion, and at just what stage he had come back to his senses again, and just how he had fallen into his miraculous knowledge of the art of swimming.

But to all these questions the sleepy patient gave only vague and wandering answers. He had no desire to discredit the delirium tradition, which was given new twists and turns as it traveled from household to household. It was discussed and amended and contradicted, and in time even ascended to the dignity of one of those highly abstruse and quite unsolvable psychological problems [1] over which the more

[1] Another equally entrancing problem, which long kept Chamboro at its wits' end, was the question as to how three small sun-fish found their inexplicable way into one of the freshly dug post-holes of Judge Eby's cow-pasture. Some held that these three fish came from subterranean sources; others just as heatedly maintained that pluvial deposit explained their presence, while still others vacillated between scratching their heads in utter bewilderment and half-heartedly believing that some overburdened kingfisher had dropped them in flight. The simple truth of the matter was that the tight-lipped and unbetraying Lonely had dumped the three fish from his bait-pail into the post-hole, on his way home from the river.

learned heads of Chamboro pondered and argued and disputed for many a month to come.

Two weeks later, however, when Lionel Clarence secretly unearthed a pair of velvet trousers and a little white night-gown from the hollow log where they had lain so long, he found that the Upper River gang had already been there, and had visited on him the tightest and hardest assortment of knots in the history of the Hole. So he decided, at Lonely's mild suggestion, that the two garments should remain in the log for all time, and nothing more be said about them.

If Doctor Ridley had his suspicions in the matter, that kindly old assuager of pain and anxiety said nothing about them, in public.

When he was sewing five neat little cat-gut stitches in Lonely O'Malley's shoulder, however, after an unhappy performance in knife-throwing (in emulation of one of the peerlessly beautiful Mexican ladies attached to the circus side-show), the shrewd old practitioner put a number of more or less disconcerting questions to his patient, as to Lionel Clarence and his swimming abilities. Getting nothing out of

the boy, he ventured the remark that Lonely had a streak of yellow in him.

"The yellow that is sometimes almost gold!" he added to himself, as an afterthought. Then he reached in under his coat-tails to that reputedly inexhaustible pocket from which came most of Chamboro's lemon-drops and horehound lozenges.

He pines upon a maple spray,
The sad-eyed, silly fellow;
And mourns of Autumn all the day
Because one leaf is yellow!

CHAPTER VII

In which Lonely gets Religion with a Vengeance

SEVEN fully armed and bloodthirsty Apache Indians, having surrounded and captured the Overland Mail, dragged therefrom the solitary passenger and tied him to a stake in Judge Eby's cow-pasture.

Under the chicken feathers and war-paint of these Apaches might be detected the exultant features of the Baxter Street gang, while the Overland Mail looked suspiciously like Alaska Alice's go-cart, hauled by the patient Gilead. It scarcely took a second glance to discover that the heroically daring and resolute captive was Lonely O'Malley himself.

A pile of sticks was placed around the feet of the pale-face, and while the Apaches indulged in a second vociferous war-dance, a match was touched to the waiting fuel. This, of course, was the signal for the Rough Riders to swoop down to the rescue. But a fresh breeze was blowing, and the Rough Riders insisted on being nothing if not convincingly

dramatic. The mounting flames singed the down from Lonely's bare legs. While the Apaches and the would-be rescuers still fought desperately, hand to hand, the flames began to lick cruelly up at the now terrified boy's trousers-legs. He shouted and called in vain. Equally in vain he strained and pulled at the stake to which he had been too well tied.

Then, with a sudden sickening pang, the thought came to him that he was to die there, that in another minute all his life would be blotted out and he would have to stand before the Judgment Seat of his Maker with all his great misdeeds on his head.

From his earliest childhood his mental conception of this Judgment Seat had been a grimly concrete one. It was a great black oak chair, which stood high above the sky-line, like a sombrely towering island above the horizon, and on each side of it rose two great desks of black oak, on which stood two ledgers bound in red leather. At each of these open ledgers, on a high black stool through the legs of which clouds came and went, sat a stern-faced angel with a goose-quill pen, calmly turning over pages and writing down little

black marks after hundreds and hundreds of names. In so doing, Lonely solemnly believed, they recorded every single sin committed on earth. At his own name, he always thought, the sterner of the two angels often shook a despondent head, for the line of dots, he knew, was almost endless, being carried grimly on from page to page and threatening some day to invade even the inside of the back cover.

There was nothing grotesque in the image to the boy; on many occasions, in fact, the vision of the implacable angel with the goose-quill pen had served to keep him to the straight and narrow path of rectitude. He could not explain, however, whether it was from teaching, hearsay, or picture-books that his conception of this Judgment Seat had first arisen.

So, in his moment of peril, it flashed through him that his line of black marks was a hopelessly long one, being carried countlessly on, unlike all others, from one big pageful to another; and with a second and deeper pang of terror he realized that he was not fit to die. His black young life had been fairly stippled with mendacity; and liars, it had been written, shall inherit Hell.

Yet die he might very easily have done — for both Apaches and Rough Riders were now gazing at him with horror-stricken eyes — had not Butcher Brennan, driving homeward with three spring lambs, chanced to see and size up the situation. He caught up a bucket of water from Judge Eby's water-trough, and scattering boys right and left as he came, doused the burning captive from head to foot, kicked away the still burning brands, and then focused on his hapless son Piggie that wrath which should have descended diffusedly on the heads of the entire band of Apaches and Rough Riders together.

Even as it was, Lonely lost his eyebrows, his forelock, and the front of his checked calico blouse. For a few days, too, his singed and blistered bandy legs were secretly anointed with soda, sour milk, moist blue clay, melted lard, witch-hazel, and, in fact, every healing and soothing lubricant which artfully and circuitously evolved household advice brought forward from the rest of the still sorrowing gang.

But long after the soreness had passed away, and the sandy eyebrows had cropped out

once more, Lonely's imagination harked back along that channel into which it had been so suddenly and so vividly plunged. He had stolen and robbed and lied. The days of his youth had been days of sin and idleness. The record against him, in the great red-bound ledger, was an overawing one.



BUTCHER BRENNAN DOUSED THE BURNING CAPTIVE

Although these brooding thoughts somewhat darkened the days that followed, they did not readily quench the old pagan and irresponsible spirit of the boy. When, for example, he and Pud Jones decided to add to their earthly stores by early morning labor in the strawberry patches, it was decided that Pud should awaken Lonely by the time-honored method of pulling on a string tied to the latter's great toe, and left dangling downward through the open window.

Pud, in a sudden spirit of facetiousness, was not content to give this string the gentle little jerk allowed by tradition. For, after a sturdy pull, he decided, indeed, to climb up the string, and only its eventual snapping, followed by a muffled howl, rendered this feat out of the question. It brought Lonely out of bed with a bound, however, wrathfully hopping about on one foot and nursing the injured member while he cried down inaudible imprecations on the boy rolling and shaking and writhing so spasmodically below.

Nothing more was said of the matter until they parted for the day, when Lonely gently reminded Pud that he was to be awakened at

five, the next morning, as before. Whereat Pud chuckled inwardly, and straightway decided to bring Redney McWilliams along to see the fun.

Before going to bed that night Lonely filled a willow bread-basket with wood ashes, well mixed with the softest and mushiest of those potatoes which a picking over of the bakery bin, weeks before, had cast out to unconsidered dissolution. To the handle of this basket, well hidden on his inner window-sill, he tied the piece of dangling string, and went to bed to sleep the deep and happy sleep of the artist well satisfied with his work.



NURSING THE INJURED MEMBER

His one regret was that he had not awakened to witness the outcome of his retributive plot. He discovered, though, that neither

Pud Jones nor Redney McWilliams attended school that morning, that neither of them had gone picking strawberries, and that the willow bread-basket had been vindictively kicked round and round the little yard until it was in tatters. When he later found out that the two boys had spent the entire morning at the swimming-hole, he sniffed once more, with zest, at the advanced dissolution of the back-yard potato pile, hunched up a contemplative shoulder, gazed down at his swollen toe and wondered if after all that meant another black mark in the big red ledger.

During those idle, empty days which intervened between berry-picking time and the midsummer holidays, when the boys of Chamboro would be turned loose on the world again, Lonely O'Malley was more and more driven in on himself. His last shred of available material had been used up for that octopus like air-ship which sucked away his time and his worldly wealth and gave nothing in return. Lionel Clarence, after his illness, was still capricious and languid; the companionship of Annie Eliza was to be resorted to only after a secretive and periodic fashion; Shivers and

Gilead, even as the Baby itself, soon palled on his newly stirred and brackish spirit, where all the marsh-gas of his stagnant young soul seemed to add more and more to the latent explosibility of his cramped and soured little life.

When the sudden yet inevitable change came, it came from a quarter least expected.

Em'ly Bird and Lulu Bird, having quarreled with Jappie Barrison and Nora Eby as to the true meaning of the familiar "N or M" of the elementary catechism, indignantly absented themselves from Sunday School and decided to hold independent religious service each Sunday afternoon in the sand-pit, down by the river, just above the ice-house.

Here Em'ly Bird read a chapter from Revelation to Annie McWilliams and Peewee Steiner, and then solemnly called on Lulu Bird for prayer. After this a hymn was sung in the dragging, high-pitched, childish voices, and Em'ly, surrounded by her following, tearfully recounted her persecutions, after the fashion of that sombre Sunday School library heroine who for the moment held sway over her shifting affection, telling of her hapless

home, of her misunderstood life, of her blighted worldly hopes, and her forgotten vanities of the flesh. But from that day forth she was to lead the life of the spirit. She was to succor the weak and help the widowed and fatherless; she was to forgive her enemies, even Nora Eby and Jappie Barrison; she was to be meek in spirit, and always to do good unto others. Here, finding the list of her potential virtues unexpectedly exhausted, she fell back on her Sunday School book, and in a slow and labored voice read to them the death-scene at the end of the story.

This started Peewee Steiner crying convulsively, to be joined later by Annie McWilliams and Lulu Bird, though Em'ly did not give herself over to the luxury of grief until the last sad lines had been read. Then with a sudden hysterical rapture of concern she pleaded with her tearful companions to lead new lives while yet there was time, that they might escape the torture of the Lake of Everlasting Fire.

Em'ly's passionate apprehension seemed to take on itself the spirit of infection, for Annie McWilliams flung herself on her knees and

prayed aloud for her soul, then and there, the tears of contrition streaming down her cheeks as she openly confessed to all of those past sins which she could remember. Then Jappie Barrison choked back her own sobs, and less raptly and more shamefacedly told of her own misdoings, while Lulu Bird rocked her body back and forth and begged that the world should not come to an end until all her sins had been washed away.

Then Em'ly and her neophytes kissed one another, and finding that the mysterious passion which had shaken their young lives to the root had already passed and died away, as strangely as it had come, they hid their Bible and Sunday School book under a ledge of sand, and escaped back to the world of realities again, wonderingly, a little frightened of one another, and of themselves.

All of this strange ceremony Lonely O'Malley heard and saw from the half-hidden mouth of his sand-pit cave, where he stood, spellbound and speechless.

It even made him feel creepy, tingling with the same little pricks of the skin as those which ran over him when errand or acci-

dent took him past the graveyard late at night.

It was all so intangible, so insubstantial, so bewildering to the untutored imagination. It was a voice from beyond the hills of reality.

Lonely crept stealthily down into the sand-pit, and with not a little trepidation exhumed the buried Bible and Sunday School story. Then he made his way carefully back to the cave, where he flung himself down and turned the two books over and over in his hand, guardedly, apprehensively, as though either of them might still hold imprisoned some terrible and occult power for good or evil.

It was the Bible which he first thrust away from him, hiding it well behind him back in the cave. For was it not the great solemn Book which stood on parlor centre-tables, the book from which terrible sermons were preached, the very arsenal, to his barbarian young mind, of all those stern "Thou Shalt Nots" which so imperiled human existence, and so beset with danger and dread youth's free and natural course?

It is true that he had had his accidental dips into the more rudimentary phases of

scriptural lore. On a few rare occasions he had even attended church, of his own free will, creeping into the huge and shadowy Cowansburg edifice with a hunted and startled look, to be overawed by the tremulous roll and thunder of the pipe-organ, and to be charmed into emitting from his cacophonous young throat an intoxicating verse or two of the choir's hymn. But church, he explained in his more intimate moods, always "choked him up." It gave him the same feeling as did the little white satin-lined coffin in the show-window of Chamboro's leading furniture-dealer and undertaker — a dim and shivery sense of depression. His Sabbath School training, unhappily, had been most irregular and spasmodic, and always suspiciously synchronous with the advent of the annual picnic to Cowan's Grove. Indeed, his last term of attendance had been brought to an untimely close through a purely innocent and above-board retort of Lonely's, who, when asked by his teacher if he was not delighted to have a little baby sister arrive in his family, honestly and openmindedly asserted that he would much rather have had a pup. This remark created such an uproar that

the Superintendent was summarily brought on the scene to inquire into its cause, and gleaning some little inkling of Lonely's utter depravity from many startling and contradictory explanations, ejected our embittered young barbarian from the class and from the Sunday School itself.

So it was Em'ly Bird's romance, bearing the dubious title of "Agatha Doring's Long Ordeal," into which Lonely first dipped. It was a startling new type of story to the eager and avid-minded boy, — like neither "The Headless Horseman" nor the "Swiss Family Robinson," for it told, in short sentences and easy words, of the suffering and heroism of Agatha Doring, tortured and ill-treated by an unconverted maiden aunt, who often sent the child to bed supperless, simply for being true to her own conscience, and often beat her, simply because she was so scrupulously honest. But in the end, after many troubles, included in which was an almost fatal attack of brain-fever, Agatha was the means of leading the maiden aunt to grace, even while casting seeds of piety far and wide along her every-day path of life.

Lonely pored over the book until the end was reached, until the sun was low in the west. Then he gazed out, through the half-lights of



PORED OVER THE BOOK UNTIL THE END WAS REACHED

the dingy little cave, into a new and wonderful world.

To do good, like Miss Agatha Doring, to greet every one with a quiet and gentle smile, to have your elders look after you approvingly,

to protect the innocent young birds and plants, to bring jelly and read fairy-tales to little girls suffering from an incurable sickness, to step in, and, with a reproving word or two, to stop the stalwart bully from beating the smaller boy, to argue triumphantly with the village infidel, as did Agatha, and worst him on his own ground and lead him meekly and humbly to the life of the spirit, even to go gloriously without a supper now and then, for the sake of some proudly and stubbornly hidden right — all this seemed so easy and so alluring to Lonely O'Malley, as he walked home through the shadowy summer twilight, with swelling breast and a firmer tread of the feet. He even pictured himself as holding revival meetings in the Market Square, with a sea of upturned faces smiling their approval and gratitude up to him, as he swayed them with the force of his oratory, and brought them one by one to that life of the spirit about which Agatha had talked so much.

Supper was over and the table cleared away long before he had reached home; slowly and unconsciously a subtle change came over the tenor of his mood.

He foraged fretfully and resentfully about, demanding to know if there was anything fit to eat in the house, and asserting, in no uncertain language, that he was dead sick of cold bread and milk, that the rhubarb tarts were sour enough to make a pig squeal.

Then, with a sudden pang of contrition, he remembered that this was not the way in which Agatha Doring bore her trials. So he consumed the remainder of his meal in silence and proud humility, remembering that from that day forward he was ordained to be misunderstood and ill-treated and misjudged.

A few minutes later his mother heard him bustling about the wood-shed, searching for soap and shoe-polish, slicking down his hair, and doing his best to sponge ancient and innumerable spots off his dust-stained Sunday clothes.

"Lonely O'Malley, what 're you sprucing up that way for, anyhow?" his astounded mother demanded, for such things were new in the career of her ever-changing son.

He fell back into his old attitude of silent humility, and addressed his parent as "mother," even as Agatha Doring would do.

"Mother, I 'm a-goin' to church!" he asserted, pleased beyond words at the startled look which this declaration brought to the other's face.

"Lonely, you ain't sick, or nothing?" cried his mother, suddenly, turning his face to the light.

"No," he answered, sepulchrally. "No, I 'm not *sick!*"

"Then *why* are you acting up this way, fixing up, and talking about going to church, and all that?"

"I am seeking for the Light and the Truth!" answered the spirit of Agatha Doring, through the mouth of Lonely O'Malley. He rolled his eyes a little, as he said it, and even came back and closed the door after him, gently and slowly.

And as Lonely had always been an enigma to his own mother, Mrs. O'Malley accepted the new mystery for what it was worth, though a blind and wistful light came into her vacant eyes as they followed Lonely out through the warm night air, down the little path, and on through the murmurous silence of the village street.

"Me poor boy!" was all she said. And Lonely, even though he had heard it, would never have understood it. "Me poor boy!"

Lonely was in time for the sermon. He made vague guesses as to just what Lionel Clarence's father meant, and certain simpler phrases now and then came home to him. But the general unintelligibility of the sermon only added to its mysterious charm. It was oracular, symbolic, to be interpreted to fit the passing moment, to be translated to suit the changing mood. It had much to do with the need of prayer and confession, which was the exteriorization and alienation of all inner sin; and if it left Lonely unsatisfied in mind, it tended to soothe him in spirit.

Early the next morning he was back in the cave, poring over the little calf-skin Bible, spelling out the words as best he could, moved with the mystery of the symbols far too great for his child-mind to grasp.

"And I stood upon the sands of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy."

It was writing the like unto which Lonely had never before read, and he went on, from verse to verse, spellbound.

"If any man have an ear, let him hear."

"He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints."

And he read on and on, unconscious of time and place, gasping over the seven angels with the seven plagues, quailing over the fall of Babylon, rejoicing over the chaining of the Dragon, and thrilling at the jeweled wealth of the new Jerusalem.

It was a fire-brand to the dry straw of his starved imagination. What seemed the waste acreage of his misspent youth, burning itself shamefacedly away, only added to the vital heat of the quick transformation.

He went back to the first of the book, and read it as carefully, yet emerged from it as dubiously uncertain as from the last of it.

Some of the faint echoes of modern science had fallen on his inattentive young ears. The whispers of modern skepticism had crept absently into his preoccupied mind.

"I 'm going to get at the bottom of this here Adam and Eve business!" he said to himself, with great determination, as he made his way boldly toward the study of the Reverend Ezra Sampson, and requested the privilege of a private conversation with that amazed and somewhat perturbed scholar.

"Is God a liar?" was the boy's first question, as he faced the clergyman, in the quietness of the little study.

"God, my boy, is the light and the truth," answered the man, forbearingly.

"But does God say one thing and then go and do another?" demanded Lonely, with unrelaxed severity.

The clergyman made sure that the door was well closed before their talk went any further. Into what channels it drifted only the minister of the gospel and his pagan young interlocutor ever knew, though it left the former in a strangely disturbed state of mind, while eventually adding little or nothing to the spiritual satisfaction of Lonely himself.

Ezra Sampson, in fact, on meeting old Doctor Ridley that very morning, confessed to him his perplexity and the unlooked-for

turn which had come in the bent of Lonely's aggressive young mind.

"Tut! tut!" asseverated the old Doctor, easily. "Don't try to pick open the bud before it unfolds!"

"But his curiosity is unlimited, and his questions are astounding, simply astounding!"

"Then let him worry and chew over 'em for a while — it 'll do his spiritual teeth a world of good. Take my advice, Ezra, and don't pack the boy full of doctrine. It 'd seem too much like trying to teach a five-year-old girl the full duties of married life!"

"But this seems more than a mere ebullition of morbid fancy. My wife claims that he is far, very far, from being the vicious character he may seem, at first sight. And I must confess that in many respects he is an extraordinary boy, a very extraordinary boy."

"He 'll get over it, Ezra; he 'll get over it! He 'll fall in love, or turn pirate, or want to be a soldier, and then the two over-blown bubbles of fancy 'll somehow touch, and both of 'em will collapse."

Yet Lonely did not get over it quite so soon as the sage old practitioner prophesied.

He borrowed what religious books he could from Lionel Clarence; he took to Bible-reading, of an afternoon, with his old-time enemy, Miss Mehetabel Wilkins, and made it a matter of conscience to accept no more than one cheese-cake at the end of the solemn conference in the little antimacassar-strewn sitting-room.



A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE TO ACCEPT NO MORE THAN ONE CHEESE-CAKE

When Mr. Sampson was told of this sustained and serious interest in things eternal, he suggested to his wife that they have the lad in for supper, and do what they could to get on a more friendly basis with him.

"It would indeed be gratifying to feel that we were the instruments of leading this darkened boy out into the light!" said the man of the cloth, with a sigh.

"And I'll have Leena make the freezer full of chocolate ice-cream," added his wife, inconsequentially. This stern but whole-souled woman had once been heard to confess that nothing gave her more joy than the sight of half a dozen hungry small boys devouring one of her dinners.

"He has been a wayward youth! But even the darkest mind seems to have its divine glimmer!"

"He's a young rip!" said Mrs. Sampson, with quiet conviction, following her own line of thought. "And I fancy he will *be* a young rip, for many a day to come!"

"There is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth —" began the clergyman, reprovingly.

"Well, I 'll have some fresh pound-cake and currant-loaf for him," said the placid apostle of materialism, from the doorway, as she went back to her jam-making.

Lonely ate supper with the Sampsons, accordingly, in his best black clothes, with his hair plastered decorously down over his ears, and a quaver of emotional tension in his more carefully modulated voice. Indeed, such a settled smile of meek and wistful melancholy played about his features that Lionel Clarence demanded to know what was making him such a stiff, and had lurking suspicions that Lonely had been eating Bordeaux Mixture again off the Gubtills' gooseberry bushes.

The Preacher's son thought that this supper was to be a rare treat, and that, being the official recognition of his newly found chum, it would find Lonely in his lightest and most engaging vein.

Never was boy more doomed to bitter disappointment.

It is true that Lonely did ample though somewhat uneasy justice to the chocolate ice-cream, to the currant-loaf and the pound-cake,

to say nothing of ample helpings of Mrs. Sampson's justly renowned quince preserve. But these were now the mere accidentals and incidentals of existence, which the excellent Lonely schooled himself to accept casually and absent-mindedly. His interest in the foreign mission field, however, seemed unbounded. He even pointedly inquired of his host if there still were left many leper colonies where missionaries could go and lead lonely, martyred, and heroically horrible lives.

Lionel Clarence looked at his guest and gasped. Could this be the same boy who had taught him to spit through his teeth!

And Lionel Clarence, with sudden unrighteous anger, kicked the new Lonely O'Malley under the table.

Lonely, at this, only smiled wanly and sadly. Lionel Clarence some day would see things as he did. His eyes would be opened, and then he would remember and be sorry!

But as there were still many points of dogma about which Lonely was almost ludicrously unschooled, Mr. Sampson invited the boy to attend his regular Wednesday evening class.

Lonely had judiciously disposed of his collection of birds' eggs, wondering how he had the heart, even in his unregenerate days, to indulge in an amusement so cruel to any of God's creatures. He had likewise for all time given up smoking, and one rainy afternoon in the Barrisons' stable even reproved Lionel Clarence for his surreptitious and unseemly indulgence in the weed.

It gave his heart a wrench to think that he had to part with his old friend Gilead, but as he went over the long list of the goat's transgressions, he saw there was no help for it, and wondered just how and where he could get rid of an offender so notorious and so steeped in all the cunning of well-seasoned crime. His first inclination was to build a funeral pyre, and offer him up as a living sacrifice, after the fashion of the righteous of olden times. This seemed to him, however, both an unalleviated cruelty and an uncommendable monetary sacrifice. So he temporized over the point until, to his unspeakable relief, he discovered that Abraham himself had been an honored and respected keeper of goats. Finding his case bolstered up with so substantial a precedent,

he firmly decided to retain Gilead in his retinue. But he no longer took outward joy in Gilead's unseemliness of action and appetite. The boy whose spiritual eyes had been opened even showed no sign of anger when Shivers rescued for the fifth time from the river the Widow Tiffins's three drowned kittens, which Lonely had as carefully though hurriedly replaced in their watery grave. Even when Gilead ate a goodly part of his newly pasted house-kite no word of reproof fell from the boy's lips — though in times past all such transgressions had marked sorry days in the predaceous existence of his meek and ever faithful pet.

One of Lonely's sorest trials, in his efforts to lead a new life, was his diurnal watering of the decrepit Plato — a task, by the way, out of which he had once wrung not a little excitement. For Plato, whether because of some mere caprice of the spirit, some mysterious weakness of the flesh, or some pertinacious association of idea, or, perhaps, even some long-continued abuse at the hands of a former owner, had to be soundly kicked in the stomach before he would drink a pail of water.

So what seemed at first sight a sheer cruelty, and had been the cause of much indignant protest at the hands of uncomprehending neighbors, was in reality a kindness. For with-



ATE A GOOD PART OF HIS NEWLY PASTED HOUSE-KITE

out this resounding thump on the ribs the muscles of Plato's gaunt throat seemed stricken with paralysis. Once the essential kick had been administered, Lonely had often noticed, a look of mute gratitude crept into his eye, his

nose went deep down in the pail, and he drank freely and eagerly.

But to the casuistic-grown Lonely a kick was a kick, and many were the deliberations and devices to force the perverted Plato to refresh himself after some more enlightened and humane procedure.

The obdurate Plato, however, had little or no idea of conduct, and Lonely piously decided that this was to be one of the thorns in the side of his new-found beatitude. It was something to be borne in meek and unprotesting silence, along with the taunts and gibes of the Gang when they came upon him unexpectedly in the comfortable and lumbering old rockaway, along with Miss Mehetabel Wilkins, on the way home from a day of cherry-picking in the country — as a reward for that new and deeper seriousness of mind so rare and yet so becoming in the young.

On this occasion, it must be recorded, the smug and serenely satisfied face of his old-time tutor in sin so worked on the feelings of the dusty Lionel Clarence that he climbed boldly up on the back of the old carriage, for the avowed purpose of punching Lonely's head.

But his loose-waisted blouse was stuffed to repletion with Early Richmond cherries, and as he leaned over the empty back seat he felt a sudden gush of winey rivers down his body, and he discreetly let go his hold, trying in vain to shake the cherry-juice from his trousers legs and even his sodden boots, where, later in the day, it solemnly convinced his Grandmother Horton that the boy was already in the second stage of scarlet fever.

Lonely, indeed, was being pointed out, all up and down the streets of Chamboro, as the boy who had been converted; and in this gracious publicity, of course, he took no little delight. He even raptly arose from his bed, late one night, and, seeking out the home of Samuel Brennan, the butcher, demanded of that rotund materialist and apostle of all ventral delights, at two o'clock in the morning, if he was saved.

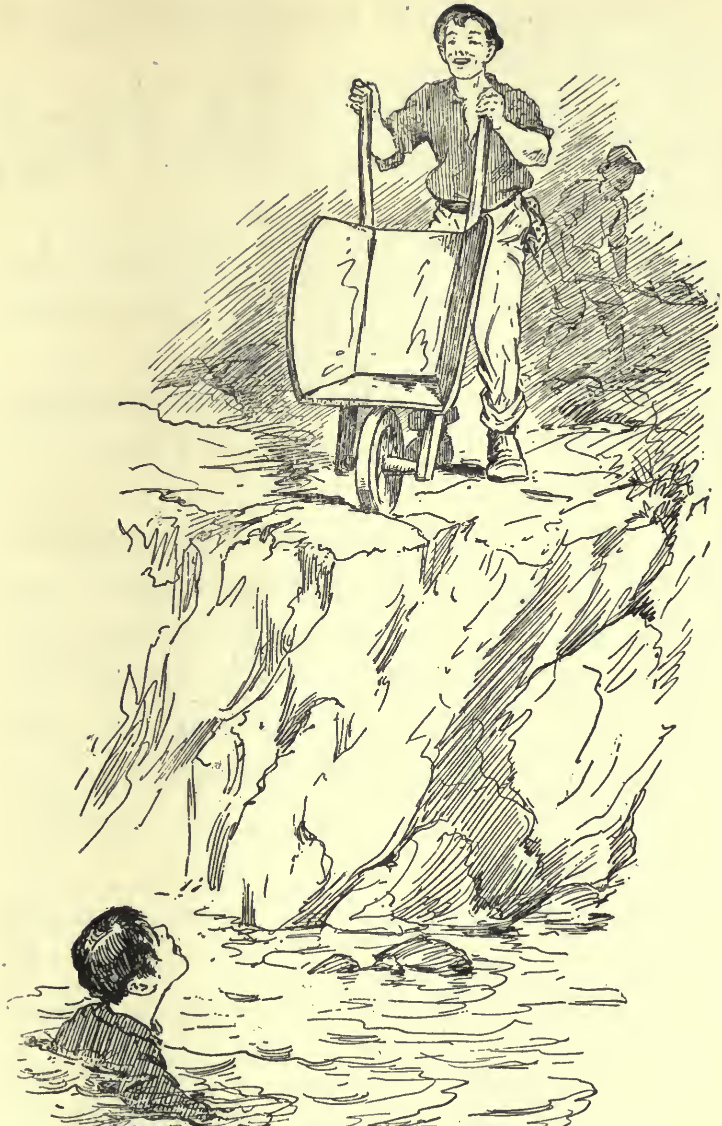
He was peremptorily told by the elder Brennan to get to the devil out of that or he would have the hide whaled off him. And Lonely went resignedly, though not altogether disheartened, for the next day his exercises in evangelism were extended to different citizens

of Chamboro — though not in any case with immediate or flattering success.

Lonely began to see what many another man had seen long before him, that his dead past was not quite dead to him. The record of his earlier life was a dark one. It would take years and years, he felt, to live it down. Perhaps it would be better, even, if he should go abroad, somewhere in the South Pacific Islands, where one wore goat-skins and lived on cocoanuts and bananas, and where the natives still fought among themselves and resorted to cannibalism, and where there was always good swimming, and sharks' fins for dinner.

The South Sea Islands being out of the question, Lonely did the next best thing, and penetrated to the *terra incognita* of the Upper River Tile Works, where he went about among the stolid laborers, reminding them of the general depravity of their ways and the utter sinfulness of their speech, — until he was picked up bodily and placed on a wheelbarrow covered with blue clay, and dumped alertly and ignominiously into the river.

"Come agin!" bawled down the burly clay-kneader after him.



"COME AGIN!"

Lonely gasped and puffed, and struck out into deeper water.

"Yes, I *will* come again," he cried back, defiantly, treading water, "and you 'll be sorry for it!"

"And what will yez do, bein' in such a state o' grace?" taunted the other, leaning Titan-like on his grimy barrow.

"Wait, and you 'll see! I *am* in a state of grace—but—but *mebbe it won't last!*" he added, darkly.

It was only the advent of Mr. Sampson's regular Wednesday evening meeting that kept Lonely from wavering from the narrow path once trodden by the saints. As had been requested of him, he came promptly on time, with his hair once more slicked down and a pensive smile once more playing about his sad young lips.

The murmur of wonder and approval which greeted his appearance was uncommonly like the first taste of blood to a rampant young tiger.

His mood of Massochistic humility passed away from him; the old intoxicating passion to be in the lead, the old madness to excel

came over him, and by the time he was called on to speak out, candidly and unreservedly, his eye was dilated, his cheeks flushed, his hands fidgety and clammy.

One fragmentary sentence, vague, cabalistic, impenetrable, from the previous Sunday's sermon, was still ringing in his ears.

"To be under conviction of Sin has always been the first of the formal steps that ended in conversion to the Newer and Higher Life!"

And he was under conviction of sin, sin deeper and darker than the mind of man could conceive, as he told his hearers at the beginning of his tempestuous and passionate peroration. And he went on with his confession of guilt, each iniquity seeming to be more and more elaborated and dwelt on and fondled over, until he appeared to glory in his own utter depravity. But so exultant did his evil become, so hopeless his utter diabolism, that he was gently but sternly interrupted by the Preacher himself, who obviated an impending torrent of righteous indignation by promptly calling on Miss Mehetabel Wilkins to address the meeting.

Lonely held up a hand, airily, as though to warn back the preacher, the impatient Miss Mehetabel, and the glowering and justly outraged widow Tiffins.

"But that ain't all — oh, that ain't all!" the rapt boy went on, shrilly and breathlessly, intent on unburdening to the uttermost his blackened young soul. "When old Br—— I mean, when *Mister* Brennan found that garter-snake in his ice-box, who put it there? Who broke the three panes o' glass in Judge Eby's conservat'ry? Who shot and et the Gubtills' rooster, and stole bologny, and cussed and swore and lied and smoked and let the steam out o' the sawmill ingin? Who put the womper in Widow Tiffins's cistern? Who —"

But precisely at this juncture, a pregnant glance having passed between Ezra Sampson and the glowering widow, the latter seized Lonely by one prominent ear, and sweeping down the narrow aisle with him, plumped him vigorously and humiliatingly into one of the empty wooden benches.

There Lonely, finding himself disgraced and undone by a sudden spasm of unexplainable weeping, fled miserably away from the flaring

lights and the circle of wondering onlookers, — fled shamefaced out through the open door into the cool night air, where it seemed to him that he had awakened from a dream, and only



HE WAS PUT IN THE INFANT CLASS

the prickling closeness of his Sunday best clothes told him it was a painful reality.

Yet he still groped blindly after his unattainable ideal. Indeed, in fulfillment of an earlier promise, he appeared at Sunday School on the following Sabbath afternoon. There, after a course of brief questioning, in which it developed that he knew neither any three of the Ten Commandments nor anything whatever

of the Shorter Catechism, he was put in the infant class, along with gorgeously appareled little girls of six and seven, and squirming little boys who still wore dresses and sailor collars.

This was too much for Lonely O'Malley, who had nursed visions of standing up beside the Superintendent, and eloquently telling the entire school the full and truthful history of his conversion, and the depths of crimes and wrong-doing from which he had been rescued. During this recountal, he thought, he would sway the multitude with the force of his eloquence, and little girls would gasp and cry to be taken out, and little boys would wag their heads knowingly at each iniquitous detail from the pages of his past life, and after that all the teachers would shake hands with him, and the prettiest one of them all would invite him home to tea, where they would have cheese-cakes and hot muffins and pop-overs and strawberry jam in abundance.

That was the vision which had floated before the self-effacing Lonely O'Malley's eyes; when, in reality, he found himself thrust down into the lowest depths of the lowest class,

among a serried swarm of tongue-tied babies and mincing girls, who did not even know the name, let alone the record, of the new Champion of Right in their unsuspecting midst.

Lonely grew fretful and irritable, and made paste balls of his lesson leaflet, and sternly fought back the vague wish that he might escape to the swimming-hole for one good dive off the new spring-board and then a back-drop or two off the old sycamore roots.

His new teacher somewhat sharply requested him *kindly* not to fidget so much, and asked him if he always squinted that way, and seemed astonished that a big boy like him should not know that Jordan was a river.

And to cap the climax she irritably stopped Lonely (who had for the moment forgotten his sorrows in the beguiling intricacies of an entirely new church tune) from joining in another verse of the closing hymn, if he could sing no better than he was doing.[1]

The shame and ignominy of it all was too much for Lonely's pride. It struck the last

[1] One of Lonely's obsessions was the fixed idea that he — the tuneless and tone-deaf — was some day to lead an orchestra.

blow at the root of his altruism. He guessed he was one of those who lived by the sword, as the verse in Revelation had said, and he guessed, too, he was going to die by the sword!

There was no sudden and moving climax to his fall. It came slowly, surely, and yet inevitably. The over-thick lees from the fermenting wine of life fell away and settled once more. And he went back to his old pagan tradition and his old pagan code. Perhaps he was not unhappier for it. At any rate he was freer and more natural; there was no attitudinizing and primping, no more morbid introspection and self-abasement.

And even though there may be those who claim that Lonely went back among the unregenerate, it was not that our poor hero stood an especially and hopelessly bad boy: it was only the code that was wrong, the tradition that was still pagan and puerile.

But from this time forward there was a change in Lonely O'Malley. He had emerged dank and sodden from those darkest and yet those divinest currents of human feeling, and it was to be many a long day before that

ablution flowered into anything more tangible than a deep-seated hatred for antimacassars, rockaways, and Sunday School books of the Agatha Doring type.

It is also worthy of record that he packed away, with that solemn and studious sense of finality which should mark all last burials, his tight-fitting and prickly little black suit, once proudly known as his "Sunday Best." He buried it deep in his mother's bottom bureau drawer, under many layers of faded winter blankets. And he hoped with all his heart and soul that he would never see the darned old rags again!

"*Oh, me poor boy!*" sighed Lonely's mother, as she came upon them once, many a year later, and carefully refolded and replaced them, bedewed with a seemingly inconsequential tear or two.

But your eyes were turned to the fluting bird,
And your brow was drawn with thought;
And I pulled six daisies out of the turf
And asked for the thing you sought.

"That solemn old bird," you idly mused,
"He's singing the whole day long —
That silly old bird — what good will it be
To him, when he ends his song!"

CHAPTER VIII

In which Lonely tells a Story or two

LONELY had just made a new box-kite for himself, and having borrowed the entire stock of wrapping-string from the bake-shop to give it ample wind-room, it now hung a little dot of white high up in the tremulous blue of the early afternoon sky.

It was the end of June, and the last day of school. In an hour or two the turbulent classes would be tumbling joyously out to their final freedom, and great undertakings would soon be on foot, and plans made, and journeys projected, and grave secrets passed from friend to trusted friend. Already timid little boys, in the general carnival spirit which crept over the sleepy little gray kitten of a town, were flipping notes across the aisle to properly indignant little girls, who wrote "Smarty" on a slip of paper and flipped it back. Already young orators were stutteringly delivering themselves of their disjointed recitations, and an ink-well or two was being emptied down

somebody's back, and the ubiquitous "spit-ball" was being volleyed back and forth. And Lonely, knowing that his long-imprisoned knights and retainers would soon be flocking about him, was dreamily content with life and his box-kite, sleepily watching the fleck of white as it floated up in the blue ether, hazily wondering if his flying-machine would ever soar to such heights with him, and even more hazily speculating as to whether or not one could ever slip into heaven, with just the right sort of air-ship, especially if one made a sufficiently wide circle about two ominous black oak chairs (with fleecy clouds drifting slowly in and out between their legs) whereon sat the two figures, writing with goose-quill pens.

Annie Eliza appeared on the edge of the Common, saw the kite, and approached Lonely purringly, toeing-in as she came. Two days before, at a tea-party of cut-up green cucumbers and carrots, she had confessed to Lonely her intention to become a Trapeze Lady, but had expressed her willingness to give over her career, and follow Lonely singly and faithfully, for the trifling gift of Shivers and what remained of his bottle of perfume.

The boy on the Common now had the kite tied down to his sunburnt bandy-leg, and was slowly and carefully cutting out round pieces of stiff cardboard, to be sent up the taut kite-string as "messengers." His tongue was thrust out a little as he worked, and it moved sympathetically from side to side at every stroke of his knife-blade.

"Oh, Lonely, let me feel how it pulls!" begged Annie Eliza, as she crept up closer to him, blinking raptly up at the blue depths that tented in her sunny world.

"Could n't!" he answered, curtly.

"Just one *little* pull?"

Lonely shook his head resolutely. This kite-flying business was not a thing for girls to get mixed up in: you had to mind your P's and Q's when you were flying a box-kite, they pulled so!

"Why, first thing you know she 'd start pullin' extra hard — and then where 'd you be?"

"Where?" echoed Annie Eliza, drawing back a little.

"Yanked over into the river, or mebbe Watterson's Crick, before you could remember to let go!"

"Does it *pull* that bad?"

"*I* made it!" said the kite-flyer, with laconic self-complacence.

"Goodness gracious!" said Annie Eliza, looking up into the blue sky once more.

Lonely emitted a gentle little ruminative sigh.

"Why, *that* box-kite is nothin'. I had a house-kite, once, in Cowansburg, and I had Winnie Douglas come and hold it for me, while I was stoppin' Gilead from eatin' one o' Pop's harness traces."

Whenever Lonely O'Malley saw red, as he was doing at that moment, Veracity shuddered on her throne.

"Go on!" said Annie Eliza.

Lonely tested the tension on his kite-string critically, pulled it in a yard or two, with a great show of exertion, and still further played for time. For Jappie Barrison and Betty Doyle and the Bird girls were coming across the Common. The larger Lonely's audience the more rapt was his recital.

"I left her there holdin' that big house-kite o' mine," went on Lonely, "and first thing I knew, along came an extra strong puff o' wind.

Gee whittaker! — there was Winnie Douglas whipped up over the walnut-trees, on the Cowansburg Common, hangin' on for all she was worth, and a-hollerin' for me to come and get her down, hollerin' away there all the time she was driftin' out of sight!"

"W — was she killed?"

"Just her good luck she was n't!" commented Lonely, beating off the lee coast of bewilderment, and heatedly demanding of his imagination just what *did* become of Miss Winnie Douglas.

"Was she drowned?" demanded Jappie Barrison.

"Nope! Just 's she was goin' over Harding's Hill she hooked her toes on a crab-apple tree, and they came and got her down, with ladders!"



"WHIPPED UP OVER THE WALNUT-TREES"

"Was she scared — much?" somebody demanded.

"Scared! She had to be shut up in a dark room, with wet towels and things, to keep from gettin' softenin' of the brain!"

"Tell us another story," said Lulu Bird.

"Who's tellin' stories?" demanded the indignant Lonely. And as Lionel Clarence came panting up at that moment, the Plutarch of Cowansburg turned his attention to more fitting company.

"Whew! She *does* pull!" cried the envious Preacher's son, as he took the taut and humming line in his hand.

Lonely modestly confessed that it was n't altogether a slouch of a kite.

"Won't you tell us another story?" reiterated Lulu Bird, patiently, as the three girls sat down and spread out their skirts about Lonely.

A look passed between the two boys, telepathic, fleeting, and yet eloquent.

"You might as well," said one look.

"What's the use?" said the other.

"Tell them about the time that she-lion got loose in Cowansburg," suggested Lionel Clarence, to whom the tale had been graphically

recounted, a month or two before, up in the O'Malley haymow.

"Oh, that was nothin' much," deprecated Lonely.

"Was it a *mad* lion?" inquired Lulu Bird.

"Just a common man-eater," explained Lonely.

A sudden shrill chorus of cries bore witness to the fact that school was out; and two minutes later scattered bands of children were racing and curveting out into the green freedom of the Common. Old Witherspoon, the town constable, eyed them closely, for experience had taught him that on such occasions law and order were often forgotten.

Cap'n Steiner and Cap'n Sands hobbled across the greensward to a shady seat close beside the kite-flier. A tug puffed and churned noisily down on the river; a robin fluted and trebled and piped across the breezy afternoon. It was a good world to be alive in.

"Go on with about the lion," commanded Jappie Barrison.

A curious boy or two joined the circle of listeners, and having critically tested the pull of the new box-kite, clustered indolently about

Lonely, and kicked their languid heels and chewed at the sweetish white inner stalks of the Common grass.

"See if you can make goose-flesh come on Pinkie Ball," suggested Lulu Bird, encouragingly.

Pinkie Ball was an easily impressed and somewhat emotional little boy upon whom all tales of horror brought the creeps. When Pinkie's skin showed "goose-flesh," during the telling of a ghost-story, the artist knew that all was going well with his work.

"I won't stay, if it 's goin' to be about ghosts!" wailed Pinkie, showing signs of terror, yet irresistibly chained to the spot.

The central figure of the little circle grew impatient.

"It was only something that happened to me over in Cowansburg," he said, off-hand. "To me and a man-eatin' lion over there."

Lonely drank in the silence that followed. A sufficiently dramatic pause having elapsed, he went on.

"I was just pikin' home from Connor's grocery, with half a pound of allspice, and half a pound of cinnamon and black pepper,



"JUST SCRATCHED GRAVEL FOR ALL THEY WAS WORTH"

and a lot of stuff like that. I was just pikin' along home, when some men ran past me, wavin' their arms and tellin' me to look out. They did n't stop to say what for, but just scratched gravel for all they was worth. Golley, how that old fat man did run!" broke in Lonely, with a reminiscent light in his eye.

"Well, first thing I knew there was n't a soul to be seen on the streets, and I says to myself, that there pickle factory 's on fire again. And I was just walkin' along between the two rows of empty houses, wonderin' what on earth *was* up, when I turned round the corner, careless-like — and *I saw something standin' there in front of me!*"

"It — it was n't the lion?" gasped Pinkie.

Lonely paid no attention to the interruption, tending even as it did to anticipate his coming climax.

"I stopped stockstill, and felt my hair stand on end, and looked. Then I rubbed my eyes, and looked again. But still That Thing stood there, right in front of me, with its teeth showin', and its tail lashin' from side to side, and its mane all bristlin' up."

"Then it *was* a lion!" gasped Pinkie, triumphantly.

"Quick as a wink I could see why all those men had scooted out. It was one of the lions got loose from the circus tent, a real Assinian lion!"

"An Abyssinian lion!" corrected Lionel Clarence.

"I always shorten it up, to save time," said the explicit historian, testily.

"Well, go on," said Jappie Barrison.

"I stood there facin' that lion, wonderin' what to do, when I saw him kind o' hunch up and get ready to spring. I was n't exactly scart; I was just mad at bein' stopped on my way home, when Pop told me to hustle. So, as I saw that lion was gettin' ready to jump, I just up with my package of pepper, and let him have it square in the nose!"

A murmur of surprise ran around the little circle.

Lonely laughed dreamily at the memory of the episode, absent-mindedly testing his kite-string as he went on.

"How that old lion did r'ar up! I jumped off to one side, just as he made his spring. It came

out about as I had figgered. All that pepper 'd made the lion as blind as a bat! And when he turned round and jumped for me again, I was twenty feet off to one side, watchin' him sneeze as he come down! and there he was, jumpin' and jumpin', not knowin' where I was!"

"Could n't he *smell* you?" demanded Lulu Bird.

"Smell nothin', — with a pound o' black pepper up his nose? He just kept roarin' and howlin' round there and jumpin' for the spot where he 'd seen me last. So when I seen I 'd fixed him all right, I sent word up to the circus folks to come and get their animal. And when they come hustlin' up with the cage, I showed 'em just where he was goin' to make his next jump. So they slipped the cage up where I showed 'em. Next jump he landed clean inside; and there he was, shut in neat as a whistle."

"But I got a great old lickin' when I got home," added the impartial and impersonal historian, "for lettin' the chili sauce get spoiled, for want of them spices!"

"Tell us another story!" reiterated the over-ingenuous Lulu Bird.

"Something about ghosts," suggested Jappie Barrison.

"You 've never seen one o' *them*, have you?" demanded Pinkie.

Lonely looked around, apprehensively. There was no mistaking the fact that his glance meant to convey to them that it was a good thing it was broad daylight, and they were there all together on the Common.

"I had a ghost *folly* [1] me once," said Lonely, dropping his voice.

"Go on!" said Lionel Clarence.

Lonely shook his head disapprovingly.

"I don't like talkin' about that kind o'

[1] Lonely, I might here add, had in his vocabulary certain words all his own. Thus, he always said "folly" for "follow." In the same way something always "snuk up on him;" a "drizzly day" was a "grizzly day" to him; he described the process of rinsing as "wrenching;" a "ripple" on the water was always a "riffle;" by "kill-dee," of course, he meant a "kill-deer;" and anything that was superlatively fine was always "slickery." Likewise, he was often heard to ejaculate: "Don't brandy words with me!" "Noise," to him, was always "noinse," "lightning" was "lightling," and his "shoulder" was invariably his "soldier." The word "vinegar" was hopelessly beyond him.

thing. *It ain't always safe!*" he added, huskily, meaningly.

Pinkie Ball began to worm his way back into the outer circle.

"Oh, go *on!*" said one of the bolder spirits, impatiently.

Lonely hunched up one of his shoulders in a shrug that plainly intimated that their blood was to be on their own heads, should disaster befall them.

"It was in the old Guiney house, that stood just about a mile outside o' Cowansburg," began Lonely, slowly. "*That house was ha'nted!*"

Ominous shakes of the head followed this declaration.

"None of the town gang 'd go near it, not even to gather walnuts. And there was bushels of 'em goin' to waste there, for the house was empty, and even grown folks would n't pry round *there* none, I can tell you! And it was so dark and quiet and lonesome-like that when you shoved in through the bushes, and you put your foot on a stick, and it cracked — why, the sound 'd nearly make you jump out of your skin. Well, Speck Litsey and me

decided we were a-goin' to find out about that ghost. Saturdays we 'd crawl in through the fence, and wriggle in past the burdocks, and shove through the bushes, and each time we 'd get able to come a little nearer to the house itself without turnin' tail every minute a squirrel ran up a tree.

"Well, Speck and me were nosin' round there one Saturday afternoon, wonderin' what made that house look so uncommon like a big white tombstone, when Speck drops flat down on his stummick, injun-fashion, and pulls me down after him. 'Did you see her?' he whispers to me, kind o' blue around the gills, and shakin' as though he had the fever-'n-ague. 'What?' I says, tryin' to look up through the bushes. But Speck, he hauled me down. 'Don't you take no risks like that, Lonely,' he says, with his teeth a-shakin'. And I began to feel kind o' creepish and queer-like, it was beginnin' to get so dark and quiet in there. Then Speck he says 'Hssssh!' all of a sudden, and I peeked up through the mullein and ragweed, and then *I seen it!*"

"What was it?" demanded Pinkie Ball, with blanching cheeks.

"It was a woman, all dressed in white, walkin' round and round and round the house, moanin' and wringin' her hands, and cryin' something awful. But that was n't all. When she come to the veranda railin', instead of walkin' round it, or climbin' over it, *she just walked right through it, same as though it was smoke!*

"'I guess I 'll cut f'r home!' Speck says to me, drawin' back through the weeds. That made me kind o' mad. 'Speck,' says I, 'I 'm a-goin' to find out what 's worryin' that woman, or bust!' says I.

"'Don't you do it, Lonely,' says he. And he began to cry, and said he 'd give me his two pouters and a agate alley if I 'd go as far as the fence with him.

"'All right, Speck,' says I, 'you go home if you want to. But don't you say nothin' about this ghost to any of the rest of the gang!'

"And Speck, he promised, and crawled back through the bushes a blamed sight quicker than he 'd come in, and squeezed through the fence, and left me there alone with that woman walkin' round and round the house, wringin'

her hands and carryin' on fit to make your hair stand up on end.

"Just to make sure o' things before I went any further, I grubbed a good-sized stone out of the old gravel walk, and let it fly at her, hard as I could go, just as she come wailin' and cryin' round the corner of the house. It seemed kind o' cruel, at first, but if she was a reg'ler, out-and-out ghost, I knew it was n't goin' to do her any harm, and if she was just foolin' and carryin' on that way for show, she would be gettin' what was comin' to her. Well, I let drive right at her, and it took her plum in the waist. But *it went clean through her, without stoppin'!* And I could see a line of sparks where it lit up against the basement stonework, kind o' blue, and sulphury, and queer-lookin'.

"Then I minded hearin' old Marm Watkins — she 's the colored woman who used to wash for the Litseys — tellin' Speck no ghost would ever walk over a cross, and if ever he got caught overnight in a graveyard, just to make a circle o' crosses round himself, and no ha'nt 'd ever get near him.

"So I went back to the road fence, and

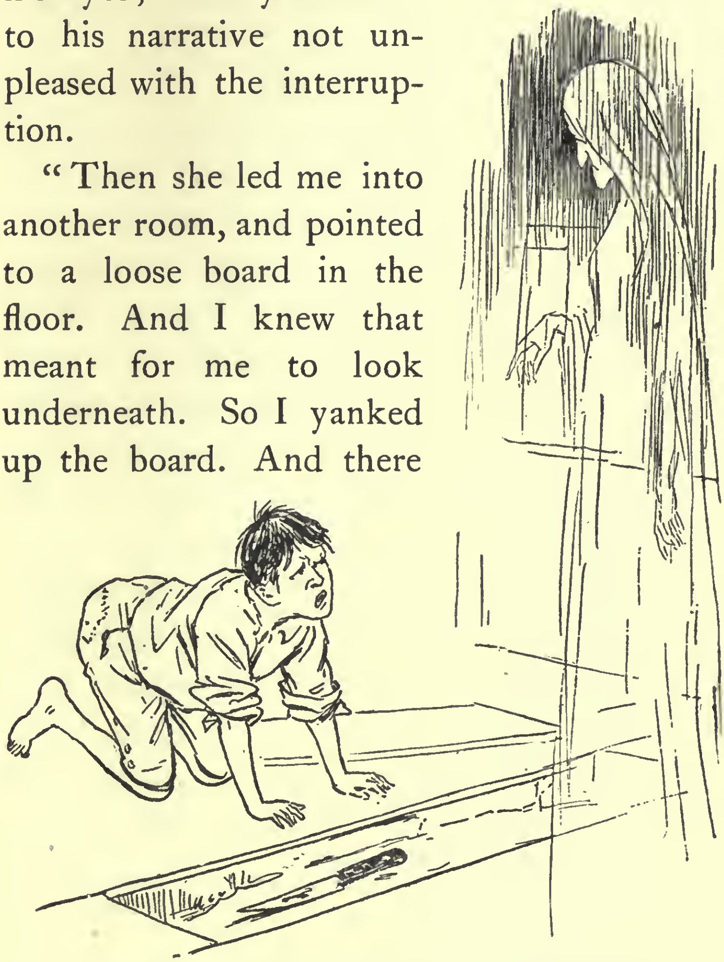
nailed two old pigots together, crossways, with a hunk of stone for a hammer. Then I crawled back and waited for my chance, and put that cross plum down in the woman's path, right between a grape-trellis and a corner of the house, where she 'd have to step over it, for sure. Then I stood back in the shadow of the house, and waited for her to come round to the front again. And it kept gettin' darker and darker, and I tell you what, I kind o' wished I was good and safe out o' that!

"When she seen that cross the woman stopped, kind o' puzzled like, and looked up kind o' fretful, and rubbed her nose kind o' inquirin', and I could hear her askin' herself over and over again why somebody 'd killed her that way in cold blood. So I stepped right out in front of her, at that, and asked her what was a-troublin' her so much. She said 'Land's sake, who 's that?' rubbed her nose again, kind o' hesitatin', and started backin' away. Then she stopped, and looked at me kind o' sad for about a minute. Then she said 'Folly me,' and led me right into the old white house, and up the old stairs, slow and solemn,

and pointed to a spot on the front bedroom floor. And *it was blood!*"

An inarticulate cry burst from the rapt Pinkie, whose mouth was open even as wide as his eyes; Lonely returned to his narrative not unpleased with the interruption.

"Then she led me into another room, and pointed to a loose board in the floor. And I knew that meant for me to look underneath. So I yanked up the board. And there



"THERE HAS BEEN SOME FOUL DEED DONE HERE"

was a butcher-knife, *all covered with blood, too!*

"'There has been some foul deed done here!' I says to the woman. And she nodded her head three times. Then she told me to folly her again, and led me all the way down through the big dark house to the cellar, and it was jam-crack full o' queer noinse in every room! And she pointed at some bricks in the floor there, and made a sign for me to take 'em up. And when I'd dug down for about a foot, I come across a long, black coffin. Gee, I felt queer. But I was n't goin' to quit when I'd gone that far. So I unscrewed the top of the coffin, and — and —"

"Oh, you 're just trying to scare us!" cried the elder Bird girl, cynically skeptical.

Lonely's half-closed eyes suddenly opened to their full width; the dreamer had been shocked into reality; this unexpected note of unbelief had broken the bubble of his ecstasy.

"You shut up, Em'ly Bird!" And Lonely was begged not to leave his tale standing at such an unsatisfying crisis.

"Who said I was tryin' to scare you?"

demanded the irate historian, however, eyeing the crowd, one by one, indignantly.

"I believe you were just making that all up, Lonely O'Malley!" said Em'ly Bird, stoutly.

"Oh, go on, Lonely!" cried Betty Doyle. "Em'ly always *does* try to spoil everything!"

Instead of going on, Lonely slowly and deliberately reached behind him, and from some mysterious vent in the neighborhood of his hip-pocket drew forth a long-bladed butcher-knife, still stained and marked with great black blotches, which any one with half an eye could see was blood.

"There 's the knife, to prove it!" he said, with a proud unconcern of mind, as it passed gingerly from hand to hand. And then he added bitterly, half to himself, "That 's the trouble of tellin' things to *kids!*"

From all quarters he was flattered and fawned over and begged to go on with his recountal. But he was obdurate, and would tell nothing more, beyond dropping a tantalizing hint that he guessed they 'd like to know how he screwed that ghost down in her coffin, and just *what* happened after that. He was even

offered a weasel and two laying hens, out and out, if he would recount in secret to the inquisitive but briefly unimaginative Piggie Brennan the final details of that adventure with the sorrow-laden ghost. At this offer, of course, Lonely shook a listless and disdainful head, and he only felt the edge of his blood-stained knife cogitatively, as Em'ly Bird asserted her firm belief that the story never *did* have an end, anyway — which may have been truer than most of that disgruntled audience realized.

Old Ezra Witherspoon, the town constable, beholding that silent little group clustered about the boy, inwardly surmised that mischief of some sort was brewing, and turned his steps in the direction of Lonely, as that guileless youth slipped his long-bladed knife deftly back into its secret pocket.

"Oh, here's that old fossil again!" exclaimed Lulu Bird, testily and not inaudibly, as the impassive old constable proceeded to make himself at home on the outskirts of the little crowd. Lulu Bird and the constable had had a misunderstanding, of late, as to the ravaging of a certain pansy-bed in the Park.

"Fossil — what's a fossil?" asked Pinkie.



THE OLD CONSTABLE PROCEEDED TO MAKE HIMSELF AT HOME

And an erratic yet fierce discussion straightway ensued as to whether a fossil was a piece of petrified wood, or just common flint rock.

Their disjointed talk seemed to bring certain memories back to the reawakening Lonely, now lying stretched out on the warm grass.

"You kids ever see a real petrifyin' spring?" he asked, sleepily, as he lifted a languid arm and sent a cardboard "messenger" humming up the vibrant kite-string.

There was a further and fiercer dispute as to whether or not petrifying springs were a mere thing of the foolish imagination, — at all of which Lonely smiled loftily and forbearingly.

"Never heard of the Catfish Petrifyin' Spring up near Cowansburg?" he demanded. They of course never had.

"And I s'pose some o' you will be sayin' the Injuns never used to soak their arrowheads in it, to turn 'em into stone?"

Had the excellent Lonely ever seen this spring? Or had any article of this excellent Lonely's ever been turned into stone therein?

Lonely gave over placidly and philosophic-

ally tickling his own nose with a feathery timothy-head, and said that of course he had seen it, and that he had hardened mud marbles in it, many a time.

" But I thought it took years and years to petrify a thing ! " protested the doubting Lionel Clarence.

" Not in the Catfish Spring," said Lonely, with much decision. " Why, Bart Connelly went in swimmin' in that spring three or four times, and he got so stiff in the knees you could hear him creak when he walked — from gettin' petrified in the joints, folks said ! "

Had the excellent Lonely heard of any other prodigious thing effected by the Catfish Spring? And the circle drew closer about him once more.

" Yes, folks was *always* gettin' in trouble about that spring," went on Lonely, with that meditative half drawl which was apt to mark his purely creative moments. " An Uncle Si of mine, who got his ankle sprained jumpin' off a load o' barley, thought the spring would be a good place to take down the swellin'. None o' this hanged petrifyin' talk was ever goin' to keep him from soakin' his foot in the

coldest runnin' water in the county, he says, and evenin's he used to go down to the spring and let that petrifyin' water run over his ankle-bone. It kept gettin' stiffer and stiffer, and he kept gettin' crankier and crankier, and one night he went to kick my goat Gilead, for eatin' up a pair of his galluses. It was a pretty hard kick. It hit Gilead all right; but Uncle Si's foot snapped off, just like a piece of marble — petrified clean through!

"Then when the Johnsons' new hired man got a sunstroke chasin' my goat out of a bean-field, and had to wash his head every day, to keep down fits, he used to go to the Catfish Spring, 'cause the water was so cool and slickery there. About the third time he'd washed his head in that water his hair began to stiffen up. Next day it rubbed off like a lot o' mortar."

A stimulating little murmur of wonder flowed and ebbed through the circle.

"But that ain't the queerest thing that happened about that spring. One of the women folks on the next farm put a six-pound roll of butter down in the spring, to get it kind o' cool and hard, and when she come

back for it, next day, there was her butter, coated with about half an inch o' limestone. How I come to know about that was b'cause she went to Pop and said I 'd hooked her butter and gone and chucked a stone down in the pail, just b'cause she 'd stopped me doin' my Spanish bull-baitin' act with their heifer. Well, the funniest part about all this here rumpus was that she slung that stone away, and about a week later old man Johnson gathered it up for the new chimney he was buildin'. Now, maybe you kids won't believe it, but that stone was built right in the new fireplace. That night when they were havin' a kind of a house-warmin' or something like that, the heat from the burnin' logs bust the stone, and, gee whittaker, down runs about six pounds o' grease. It puzzled old man Johnson a good deal, and I had a talk with him about it, and we both decided if there was *one* stone in that neighborhood bearin' oil, there ought to be a heap more. So old Johnson, he went around for about a week, with a hand-drill, tappin' about every old hard-head on the farm!"

Lonely seemed to chuckle inwardly over the memory of it all, murmuring placidly to

himself: "And I guess I got even with the old stiff, for a-tattlin' about me swimmin' in the reservoir!"

And again Lonely chuckled to himself, though the drift of it all seemed slightly above the heads of his auditors.

"But the out-and-out worst thing that happened about that Catfish Spring was the time the Johnson baby got lost. They could n't find that baby anywheres, though they hunted for days, and then for weeks. And in the end they all thought it must have been carried off by gypsies, or mebbe the circus folks had got it. Well, one day the hired man let go his holt on the water-jug, as he was dippin' out of the spring, and he had to get the garden-rake to fish it out. He got the rake-teeth caught on the jug all right — least so it seemed to him, but that jug appeared uncommon heavy to him. It was about all he could do, I guess, to get her to the top. He made a grab down to catch it before it sunk, and the first thing he knew *he had grabbed hold of a stone hand!*"

Lonely had a trick of making his voice go hollow and low, when he delivered himself of

a climactic sentence; and there was another uneasy stir among the circle of listeners.

"It — it was n't the baby, was it?" asked Jappie Barrison, almost tremulously.

"It was Johnson's baby," said Lonely, with impressive slowness. "And turned to solid stone, from head to foot!

"That hired man dropped her a couple o' times — he was in such a hustle to get up to the house with the news — and chipped a piece or two off her. But he got her home, and leaned her up against a what-not in the parlor, and called 'em all in to look at her. The old man did n't have the heart to bury that baby, it seemed so natural and lifelike, and though Arabella — she 's the oldest girl, and meaner 'n cats! — wanted the old man to use the figger for a sort o' tombstone for the rest o' the fam'ly, and so save a heap o' money, she said, he was so took up with that petrified child that he just kept it round the house for a sort o' ornament."

Lonely came to a finish, and leaned back contentedly.

"*Them 's lies!*" said the ever-antagonistic Em'ly Bird, promptly, and with conviction.

Lonely reached languidly for his kite-string, and began slowly to haul in, squinting absently up at the dot of white that grew bigger and bigger in the tremulous blue above. Then, in the puzzled silence that followed on the end of his narrative, the quite forgotten old town constable was heard suddenly to slap his leg and to declare with much zest that that was the beatenest thing *he* had ever heard on!

In fact, while Lonely went on to recount how he had caught a certain mad dog in a lap-robe, and thereby saved many children from impending death, the rotund and credulous town constable sat down between old Cap'n Steiner and Cap'n Sands, and gave the two aged skippers the story over again, as best he could, and again slapped his leg and declared it to be the beatenest thing *he* had ever heard on!

But why, alas, go on with the sad fabrications of this conscienceless Lonely O'Malley? They are of moment, it must be confessed, only as they stand an evidence of that youthful and exuberant activity of imagination which in maturer years was to exert such a marked influence over our Lonely and his career. That

these imaginings had no objective counterpart in life took away nothing from their intoxication. Even Lonely himself often came to believe in them. And if, indeed, all these airy



THE CONSTABLE GAVE THE STORY OVER AGAIN

escapes from the cramping and monotonous obligations of an over-stern veracity were lies, pure and simple, — each of them was at least the lie heroic, a shadow of those diviner lies of art and poetry from which spring earth's oldest and highest delights. So vivid could

these fancies of Lonely's become that with due repetitions and elaboration they became almost visualization, as, for instance, his stubborn and unshaken belief — quite destitute of all historical corroboration — that when not yet six years of age he had been taken up in a balloon, and had been roundly scolded by a certain old maid of Cowansburg for breaking her rosebush in alighting.

Yet in those affairs which his pagan tradition designated as matters of honor, Lonely could be an almost morbid literalist. All through his career, both early and late, it is true, he found it woefully hard to shun extravagance. Yet he could hold aloof, with a scrupulosity that was almost overnice, from those deeds and ways which his warped young conscience ordained as wrong. To raid and forage, glibly to identify one's self with any religious denomination that contemplated a picnic-giving, to steal into the circus, to go swimming and fishing on the sly, to put tick-tacks on windows and black pepper on school stoves, to trespass in orchards and to purloin eatables in general, — in fact, to partake at all times of the bounty of nature without too close inquiry into the

virtual rights of possession: all these were sanctioned by the timeless though unwritten Code, and seemed fit and proper for the boy to do.

But to interfere with another boy's bird-trap, to have any doings with a rival's night-line, to foregather with girls, except under the sternest compulsion, to "fobble" [1] marbles, to "tittle-tattle," to go about spick and span like a Miss Nancy, to refuse to share an apple, even in the face of impending "hog-bites" and "lady-bites," to cheat in any game of chance or test of skill — in all these the taboo of the Code was as inexorable as the law of the Medes and Persians. For, as the kindly old Doctor Ridley used to argue, the average boy is little

[1] "Fobble," I take it, found its root in the old verb "fob," to cheat, or trick. In fact, many a word used by Lonely and his chums, would be found not only amazingly Shakespearean, but, in a way, also startlingly indicative of the pertinacity of all boyhood tradition. Thus youthful Chamboro, with Imogen, designated an ill-favored one as a "jay," it was a more or less common practice to "mitch" from school, and when a boy "snitched" he was, of course, following in the footsteps of the old English snitcher or informer, — while the ever-familiar "cheese it" came from an *argot* quite as antique.

more than a Red Indian. "When he 's a good boy he 's a dead boy, in so far as his youth has been eternally lost to him — just as a good Red Indian 's a dead Red Indian. As for me, I want 'em bad, and like to see 'em bad!"

But, ah, Lonely, Lonely, no matter how that kindly old man of medicine and timely advice and horehound drops may try, he can never hold you up as a model for the young! And no matter how I attempt it myself, Lonely O'Malley, no matter how I extenuate, and repress, and extol — how, indeed, am I ever to paint you as a hero should be painted? How shall I even make you seem half sensible and rational, and not as shatter-pated and mad as a March hare?

For on the very day when he had crawled in under the Johnsons' barn to rescue a homeless cur with a broken watering-can tied to its frenzied tail, and had been bitten at without resentment, and had worked patiently and sturdily over the knot, and had fed and conciliated the homeless one, — on that very same day, I repeat, he had not only wandered ecstatically off, while consuming green snow-apples in the Sampsons' driving-shed, into

devious gross fictions as to certain weird adventures and perils which had once beset his father in the Klondike, but later in the day, while basking in the presence of a jug of lemonade and a plate of Mrs. Sampson's tea-cakes, he had lied, deliberately and consciously — lied voluntarily, openly, and unnecessarily. The gossipy and garrulous and yet religion-loving Widow Tiffins, the secret aversion of the long-suffering Sampson household, was there; and had not only driven the Preacher himself into the upper regions of the house, but had prolonged her loquacious visit well on into the afternoon, until Mrs. Sampson, in desperation, had called in Lonely and Lionel Clarence, in the hope that an audience so diversified might cause the lean and ferret-eyed widow to turn to topics less maliciously personal. But still she had tarried.

A moment's silence had finally fallen on the little company as a door blew shut in the June breeze, and Lonely had just sunk his teeth into a fifth tea-biscuit, when the humanly peevish voice of the descending and sadly deluded Preacher sounded from the front stairway.

"*Has* that old cat gone at last, my dear?"

A second and a more awful silence followed this ill-timed question. But Lonely looked up unperturbed.

"*Ma went over an hour ago!*" he called placidly up to the approaching minister, now halfway down the stairs.

Then the boy looked blandly and soberly into the Widow Tiffins's ferret-like eyes.

"You know Mr. Sampson *always* calls ma the old cat — 'specially after she threw that hot water on Lionel Clarence!" he explained, with unruffled composure.

Lionel Clarence was on the point of heatedly challenging this strange statement, when his mother pressed another tea-biscuit on him, and bent a face of very vivid red over the lemonade pitcher, stirring viciously at the sugar in the bottom.

But the yawning chasm had been bridged, the unsuspecting Widow Tiffins had caught up the broken threads of her discourse, and the Preacher himself had at least somewhat recovered himself before he reached the parlor door.

From that time forward not the minutest

reference was ever made to the incident. Some latent strain of sympathy in Lonely forever restrained him from bringing it up. Once, and once only, the eyes of the man and the boy came together. In that glance two timeless traditions, two ancient civilizations, focussed and met. It was the barbarian Hellenic Code looking into the eyes of the Hebraic; and reluctantly it must be confessed that it was the gaze of the mature man that fell before the gaze of the diminutive young pagan.

Even two days later, when the Reverend Ezra Sampson came face to face with Master Lonely O'Malley, as the latter, having drawn in a pungent mouthful of mullein-leaf smoke, sauntered unexpectedly around the corner, luxuriously and slowly emitting the same, the apostle and the upholder of the Hebraistic Code turned forbearingly away, and busied himself with a minute and quite fanciful inspection of the half-wilted peach-trees that hung over Judge Eby's high picket-fence.

Here out on life's unaltering hills
You gaze with half-regretful eyes,
Where youth's autumnal twilight fills
Their depths with drifting memories

Of when you walked and knew no care
And idly stopped to disentwine
The blossoms woven in your hair
To lay them laughingly on mine,

Or to some windy hill would bring
Light thistle-down, and lost in thought,
Would watch it float, half-wondering
What old-time home or star it sought.

CHAPTER IX

In which the Greyhound steps forth

IT was, of course, Lonely O'Malley who first carried the bacillus of piracy into the quiet homes of Chamboro. And it was his potent and artful planning which likewise led to the outfitting of the Greyhound.

But you never would have taken the Greyhound for a pirate ship. That is, so to speak, at first sight. She was so ponderous and patient-looking, so massive and meek of appearance!

Nor would you have dreamed that eleven scowling men lay aboard her betimes, armed to the teeth — seven scowling men who spoke ever and anon in hoarse whispers, as tradition demanded, and walked with a rolling gait, as brigand and pirate and outlaw have done since ship was first scuttled and traitor first hanged to a yardarm!

If some one, indeed, had even whispered to you that there was a pirate ship coasting up and down the placid waters of the river and

Watterson's Creek, flying its skull and cross-bones in the very face of the solemn old town of Chamboro, you would have pooh-poohed the idea, and even inwardly chortled a bit, for if ever there was a sober and staid and sleepily respectable old town it was Chamboro. And if ever there was a quiet and slumberous and unromantic stretch of water it was this same Watterson's Creek.

For some twenty circuitous miles it wound sleepily down through gardens and orchards and farm-lands, to join the even sleepier river, on which rafts of logs and strings of honest and hardworking scows, and even a bustling steamer or two, decorously came and went, — "An' not one o' them carryin' so much as a boardin'-net!" Piggie Brennan had exultingly noted. During midsummer the waters of the river were the alluring yellow of sweet stagnation, except, of course, at the bend just below the slaughter-house, where the upper town swimming-hole was. Here they were of a somewhat darker hue; but bless you, water is water the world over! And at one side of this swimming-hole there was a big old wide-rooted buttonwood, which was just the

thing for diving; and on the other side was a priceless mine of blue clay, soft, oozy, irresistible. Yet the argosies that floated up and down those staid and unruffled waters, it must be confessed, were chiefly cargoes of brick and sand and limestone.

Even the Greyhound herself, in the days when she was still respectably known as the Maggie Watson and had no thought, indeed, of ever flying the skull and cross-bones at her masthead, had journeyed under many an ignominious burden of red brick and plastering-sand. But for two long years, before drifting into those dark and evil habits which were to prove such an unlooked-for disgrace to her old age, the Maggie Watson had lain abandoned, just under the railway bridge, with tadpoles and wrigglers disporting themselves between her battered decks, and Chamboro's one cab-driver calmly and impudently using her as a platform whereon to wash down, of a Sunday morning, his imperishable old four-wheeler. Here, for two years, she had been gazed on passively yet regretfully.

It was with the advent of Lonely that the beginning of the more aggressive policy coin-

cided. Then, day by day, numerous horseshoe nails worked at the heavy iron padlock that kept her a prisoner beside the piles of the old bridge. Here she was examined, and talked over, and even belabored as to her chain-bound stern and pried at as to her ponderous bow. But still she clung tenaciously to her old mooring, while Chamboro's newly awakened dreams of piracy went unrealized.

But in what land, since boy drew breath, can piracy be kept down! It comes as implacably and mysteriously as the mumps or the measles. It's an atavistic taint in the blood, a vagabondic diathesis — a regurgitation of savagery, innocently relieving our colic of civilization, and the sooner it breaks out and is over and done with the better!

And all of this brings me round to the pirates themselves. Yet who, indeed, would ever have suspected them! Who could ever have foretold that weak little Willie Steiner, who daily took a spoonful of emulsion for the jam that came in its wake, was to dig three good feet of the pirate cave in the creek bank, hidden away in the scrub willows, just above the Cemetery! And who would ever have dreamed

that the chubby-faced little Pinkie Ball, with a burst of energy that brought rivers of sweat out of his fat young body, had carried fence-



LITTLE PINKIE BALL CARRIED FENCE-BOARDS

boards all the way from the Wilsons' orchard for the boarding-in and shoring-up of this same cave, whose roof had previously shown a frequent tendency to collapse on the heads of the startled pirate band, whenever in solemn con-

clave assembled! Who would have imagined that Piggie Brennan, the hero of a hundred fights, now that he was daily to be taking his life in his hands, had secretly fallen to wearing sundry small gloves and bits of hair-ribbon under his copiously patched merino blouse! And how was the Rector of All Saints to understand the trepidation of his son Lionel Clarence, already destined for the ministry (in his mother's eyes) when three prolonged owl-hoots followed by two low whistles came mysteriously from without the Rectory window of an evening, and turned the pink-tinted quietness of the library into the gloom of a prison for one stifling and rebellious young heart! Or who was to explain to the rotund old Witherspoon, the town constable, just why he was no longer kept busy putting out smudges in vacant lots and bonfires under wharves, and why there were no more Indian massacres on the Common, and no more of those strange circus exhibitions, which had threatened the destruction by fire of not a few of the more commodious barns and stables of Chamboro!

From the day, however, that Captain Lonely O'Malley and Pud Jones first discovered that

the Maggie Watson might be purchased for the sum of three dollars, cash down, a subtle change came over the youthful hearts of Chamboro. The immensity of that sum, it is true, staggered the boys not a little. The following afternoon it was talked over in the cave. The boy who was already destined for the ministry, but was known of late beyond the precincts of the Rectory as "Slugger," had thoughtfully brought with him an ample jar of his mother's last year's pickled peaches, and while regaling themselves on this delicacy the entire party thrashed the matter of the Maggie Watson out to the bitter end.

Pinkie Ball — most of whose pennies found their prompt way into Pratt's confectionery — saw no fun in wasting money on a pirate ship, when it ought to be taken by force of arms.

"Who ever heard of pirates buyin' a boat, anyway?" he demanded, contemptuously. "If we 're real pirates, why don't we go an' *capture* her?"

"Then s'posin' you go out and find something for us to capture!" answered the Captain, with the honor of his band to uphold.

"What 's the matter with buyin' her first," said Redney McWilliams, already elected First Mate, his utterance somewhat choked by an especially large and succulent peach, "and then givin' her away to old Sanderson, or somebody, and capturin' her back?"

The extremely aged gentleman to be thus honored, however, was so sickly and decrepit that it was a matter of history that his daughter cut up his meat for him; and the suggestion was discarded as unworthy able-bodied pirates.

"Well, there 's one thing," said Willie Steiner, through his pocket handkerchief; "I 'm sick o' this here cave. There 's nothin' funny about havin' a cold in the head all the time!"

"You were crazy enough to git her built!" scoffed the Captain.

"Well, but I 'd like to know where the fun is sleepin' in a cave when you 've got to have pains in your joints all the time!"

"And I don't see much use in a place that chokes you up with smoke every time you make a fire!" objected Piggie Brennan.

"And you 're not feelin' scart about bein' raided all the time, at sea — I mean out on

the Crick!" said timorous Freddie Stevens. "Besides," he added, after a pause, "it does n't seem so much like stealin', when you come and take things with a ship!"

Freddie's conscience was troubling him because of a pound-cake which certain rats had made away with, from the second shelf in Mrs. Stevens's pantry.

"I think you 're making an uncommon pig of yourself over those peaches, Redney!" interposed the Preacher's son.

"You don't have to pay out good money for caves!" said Pinkie, sadly.

"It 's too muddy and dark in here all the time, anyway!" added Biff Perkins.

"You were n't all talkin' that way about three weeks ago!" said the Captain, as he strode back and forth, with one shoulder hunched up, and his arm over his chest.

And so they squabbled on until a vote was taken on the question, and even Pinkie swung round with the majority, and it was unanimously decided that the Maggie Watson should become the property of the gang. But from that day on, mind you, she was to be spoken of and known as the Greyhound,

a compact which was duly sworn to and elaborately signed for, in blood, along with sundry other items also duly laid down with equally impressive ceremonies.

There was no time to be lost, they felt, for those halcyon days, the summer holidays, were already at hand. It was the season of blue skies and warm evenings and strange unrests, the season of lazy afternoons and disturbing dreams of far-off things, the season when a passion for water and roving is born, when the world is big and wonderful and echoing with alluring voices, when the touch of shoe-leather is an abomination to the foot, and a garden-hoe is a sordid emblem of slavery. It was the time when the fat old constable grew more watchful and wary, when river-booms were unchained, and orchards were ravaged, and when young vagabonds, not two years out of skirts, rebelled against the cruel bondage of home life, and were apt to make for the woods to be Indians.

But with the purchase of the Maggie Watson — there, it slipped out before I could stop it! — with the purchase of the Greyhound, all of these trivial things were forgotten, and

a new and richer coloring tinted existence. For purchased she was, though just how, it would not do to question too closely.[1] It is only known that back yards and garrets and cellars were ransacked for bottles and rags and metals and bones, scoured and ransacked as they had never been scoured and ransacked before, that early vegetables were mysteriously peddled about the foreign parts of the town, that copper bottoms were deftly taken from boilers which had, indeed, merely been laid aside for repairs, and that even flatirons had been known to disappear as though by magic. Sunday pennies that should have gone to the clothing of the heathen were grimly held back. Bills were peddled, and errands were run with an alacrity never before discovered in the small

[1] How Lonely raised a goodly portion of this purchase money is, perhaps, worthy of passing note. He took a contract from Judge Eby to remove from a driveway several cords of field-stone — a task of many days for one boy alone. Lonely, however, having organized a fire brigade among the gang, built a good-sized bonfire in the nearby ditch, — and the zealous brigade, in feverish and determined attempts to smother this conflagration, seized on the nearest stones, and performed a week's work without even knowing it!

boy of Chamboro. Pet rabbits and pigeons were sorrowfully bartered away, — three different times was the faithful Gilead sold and resold, — and at last it all ended in the transfer — under the greatest secrecy — of the Greyhound to her new owners. She was taken



SILENTLY POLED UP WATTERSON'S CREEK

one quiet moonlight night from the shadows of the old railway bridge, and as silently poled up Watterson's Creek to a screening clump of willows, not more than an owl's hoot from the cave itself.

That moonlight migration marked the Great Divide in the life of the Maggie Watson. Yet before she could become the Greyhound,

great changes had to take place. Bulwarks had to be built up around her, as befitted a fighting craft. In her stern a cabin had to be constructed, and in doing this the Captain insisted that the rudder-stock be lengthened, so that while handling the tiller he should be able to stand grandiosely exalted on that little upper deck of the cabin roof.

These additions, it must be explained, gave to the Greyhound the ponderous stateliness of a Spanish galleon. The pirates later tried to do away with this impression of heaviness by the angle at which they set up the Greyhound's masts. But rake these two masts as devilishly and debonairly as they could, the old-time purveyor of brick and sand, naturally enough, refused to shake off her look of phlegmatic and even sullen ponderosity.

And when her first sailing test came about, she not only refused most stubbornly to respond to the tiller, but even in the fiercest gale of wind loomed slowly and solemnly onward, with the funereal stateliness of a coal barge. Still not despairing, her crew went lustily to work and rigged her up with oars, four on a side, somewhat after the fashion of

a Venetian galleass. Once under way, and especially when the Captain and the First Mate assisted with poles from the stern, she moved at a surprisingly brisk rate of speed, although it *did* take a power of churning and straining to get her started.

"But won't she be a peach for rammin'!" cried her Captain, joyously, as he watched her loggy side crush an orange-crate against a boom-end.

It was only the pirates themselves who ever knew just what this transformation entailed. What sly dismantling of fences and chicken-coops! What purloining of screws and nails and scantlings and odds and ends of boards. What nail-bereft woodsheds that leaned awry; what fences that stood suddenly bare and skeleton-like; what sidewalks that tripped you up quite unexpectedly, because of an unwholesome absence of spikes; what soulless rending of good linen sheets for the making of sails, what strange disappearings of clothes-lines for the manufacture of rigging! And what sawing and hammering and pounding and blistering of hands and bruising of thumbs, before it was all brought about!

But even more momentous than all this was the arming and provisioning of the Greyhound. It was the latter undertaking that



STANDING GRANDIOSELY EXALTED ON THAT LITTLE UPPER DECK

progressed so spasmodically, for the more appetizing the acquired delicacy, it seemed, the more mysteriously rapid its disappearance. The things that came to hand most readily were the very things least wanted. Freddie Stevens, for instance, found no apparent difficulty in supplying an unlimited amount of chow-chow and sweet pickle, but where were they to look for more substantial dishes with which to enjoy such delicious condiment? — though it must be admitted that three live chickens had squawked their last within the Greyhound's darkened cabin! An untried cook, however, had neglected to remove more than the feathers from the prize, with a result that they were nibbled at somewhat disdainfully, Piggie Brennan being the only member of the crew who could go in for them with any gusto.

A sort of Nemesis, indeed, seemed forever on the heels of those brave young pirates. If four custard pies mysteriously disappeared from a pantry window, they vanished with even greater mystery when once brought aboard the Greyhound. If there was a pound of gingerbread to be eaten, the Captain called

in vain for men to man his ship. If there was so much as a jelly-roll in the provision chest, you were sure to find the voracious First Mate absent from his post. The final result was that both Captain and crew had to fall back on early harvest apples and an occasional mess of boiled potatoes, garnered from water-side gardens when the owners thereof were wrapt in sweetly unconscious slumber. When the apples were over-green, they were baked, or rather half-baked, in the old cook-stove whose three rusty joints of purloined stove-pipe protruded uncommonly like the muzzle of a six-inch gun from the port side of the Greyhound's cabin.

Not that this gallant ship did not carry arms more deadly! Every man who walked her decks was armed, if not with sling-shot and bow and arrow, at least with a key gun. If you have never used or known a key gun, of course you cannot understand just how deadly it is. 'T is made from an old key, hollow of shank, and the bigger the key the better. A touch-hole is supplied by filing through to the inner end of the hollow, a few grains of priming powder are sprinkled on this

touch-hole, and when well filled and aimed, it has been known to hit a target six good paces off! Its one disadvantage, however, was the frequency, I might say the inevitability, with which it burned your fingers. Yet this did not shatter in the pirates that mystic love of fire-arms and powder which burns in the pagan breast of every young boy. To describe it, or to account for it, is impossible. Love of woman may come later; love of gold may eventually supplant it. But never can the most golden hair or the most golden hoard re-awaken that first, fierce, primal thrill which comes of beholding the smoke-stained grimness of a secretly acquired old rabbit-gun!

Besides his key gun, which swung from almost every pirate's belt, their arsenal could boast of two bullet-moulds, several feet of lead piping, a Flaubert rifle, out of order, an air-gun, six sling-shots, two hatchets, and three broken garden-rakes, which were to serve as boarding-irons, to say nothing of several bottles filled with gunpowder and rigged with dangerously swift-burning fuses of home manufacture. Most of this gunpowder, I may add, had been illicitly secured by Binney Penny-

father, whose father was a veteran duck-shooter; and had involved the disgorging of several hundred loaded cartridges, — a deed



BACKED BY A MASKED AND SCOWLING MAN

for which Binney was doled out fit and proper punishment many months later. Nor must we overlook the brass cannon — gun and carriage weighing fully three pounds — even though sagely and securely spiked by a wise

parent before it ever came into the possession of the pirates. It frowned down from the bow of the Greyhound in a manner most menacing, however, and more than one little girl had been known to turn pale when it was held threateningly against her palpitating bodice, backed by a masked and scowling man demanding if she had no more than those three apples in her pocket!

And, on the whole, the cup of happiness of our pirates would have been full to overflowing, but for one thing. And that was the sad fact that the Greyhound was given to leaking so ungallantly. They had nailed up her rents, they had plugged and caulked her cracks with oakum, and had ruined a dozen suits of clothes in painting her with pitch and tar and red lead. But still she leaked. All through her meteoric career in fact, she never knew what it meant to possess a tight bottom. Day and night, when afloat, a man had to be stationed at her pumps (secretly appropriated from the McWilliams's cistern); and many were the miseries and heartburnings this perpetual and irremediable failing gave rise to among her saddened crew.

Captain Lonely O'Malley stoutly maintained, however, that all pirate ships had to leak, especially after they 'd been scuttled three or four times!

To Annie Eliza

(Growing Somewhat Oldish)

Ah, Mistress Annie, though you throw
Each girlhood game away,
I see, alas, 't will come to pass
That other games you'll play!

Now you've outgrown your skipping-rope,
And your last lisp or two,
By sterner name will go this game
Your teens have given you!

('T will not be dolls and dishes, Dear,
For you, alack-aday,
So wise must grow that you'll soon throw
Mere toys — and me — away!)

You'll break each cup and tea-thing up, —
You'll lose your taste for tarts,
And as you've played with dishes, Dear,
Too soon you'll play with hearts!

CHAPTER X

In which certain Pirates are unexpectedly pursued

IT was a sultry, close day in July, and even old Cap'n Sands, who had seen the sun beat down on Chamboro, on and off, for some seventy long years, could recollect no hotter weather. "Leastaways, Henery," he qualified, "fer this time o' the year!"

In this old Cap'n Steiner, mopping his brow with slightly palsied hand, was not inclined to agree. There was a day in Seventy-Nine, he held, that had seemed a sight hotter to him — the Sunday week after the sawmill was burned and Bill Rankin's wife was taken with a stroke on the Market Square, and the whole town said it was a touch o' sun.

"Well, right here suits me well 'nough!" said old Cap'n Sands, placidly. He was the more corpulent of the two, and he fanned himself languidly with his well-worn panama hat.

They were seated in the shade of the maples on the Common, that stretch of open

green between Watterson's Creek and the river, gazing ruminatively down the sweep of shimmering yellow water toward the far-off freedom of the Great Lakes — the wider seas they had braved and known for so many years. Indeed, forty summers before, they had both had a hand in the planting of the very trees under which they sat dreaming autumnly of old times and old friends.

This had long been their favorite seat, under the useless old cannon, just at the point of the Common, from which no craft creeping up or down the river could escape their sharp old eyes. And they knew every craft that sailed those waters, from dug-out to excursion steamer, and had known some of them for half a century.

When, therefore, Cap'n Steiner's eye wandered up the glazed and mercury-like surface of Watterson's Creek that hot morning, and beheld an utterly unknown craft creeping down towards the river, he drew Cap'n Sands's startled attention to that fact, and together the two old cronies hobbled down to the dilapidated Common Wharf, and leaning on their sticks, looked anxiously out at this

strange vessel, each with his keen eyes shaded by a slightly unsteady hand.

"Kin you recollect that craft, Silas?" asked Cap'n Sands.



KIN YOU RECOLLECT THAT CRAFT, SILAS

Cap'n Steiner looked again, and waited for some time before he answered. While he waited the strange, dark craft crept down closer and closer to the Common Dock. Cap'n Sands was studying her ensign through his highly polished old marine glass.

"Seems to lie uncommon low in the water!" commented Cap'n Steiner. "No, Henery, I can't say as I 've seen her a-fore!"

She swept still closer. Then, against the glare of the sun, they made out high on the roof of her cabin the armed and befeathered form of the Captain, with his tiller firmly in his hand, his feet planted well apart.

A minute later they caught the glitter of the brass cannon in her bow. Near by paced the First Mate, every now and then sweeping the horizon with his glass, surreptitiously munching at a ginger-snap.

Then the two startled old captains made out eight small boys — eight small boys tugging and pulling at eight unwieldy and strangely shaped sweep-oars. Their faces were red and wet, and their mouths were oddly puckered up. Beside them, as though prepared for instant use, unmistakably lay firearms and boarding-irons.

As the strange ship drew still closer the two silent watchers made out a dashing turkey-feather in the hat of each member of the crew. They also discerned that the Captain's face wore a dark and unchanging scowl, and that his voice was unnecessarily hoarse as he called out his word of command.

The two old captains exchanged glances.

"Hail 'em, Henery!" said Cap'n Steiner, shaking a bit.

Cap'n Sands raised his hand to his mouth, and let forth an old-time bellow.

"Ship a-hoy! What ship is that?"

Eight startled oars hung poised in the air. There was a hurried consultation on board. Two heads in particular tried to hide themselves behind the bulwarks. Was it right for pirates to say just who and what they were?

"Why, bless my soul! If that ain't my Sarah's boy! My young grandson, sir, and look at him! And his mother 'tarnally sayin' he's too delicate in the chest to pick the potato-bugs off'n the vines!"

It was Cap'n Steiner who spoke, blinking down at his weakling offspring with startled

eyes. Cap'n Sands himself suddenly grew serious of face, and with his stick pointed out a certain small boy with a very red face, who dropped his oar for a moment to wipe a very moist forehead with a partly rolled-up gingham shirt-sleeve.

"Why, I 'm an old sinner if there ain't Charlie Ball's boy! And Charlie jus' sayin' over to Rankin's how that boy o' his was born tired!"

"An' on *sech* a day!" exploded the other old seaman, overcome.

Before they had recovered from their shock the Greyhound slipped silently and mysteriously away, as all pirate ships should, no matter how flattering such salutations may seem, coming as they did from the oldest sea-dog in all Chamboro.

Cap'n Steiner stood leaning on his cane, gazing after them pensively. Cap'n Sands at first showed signs of becoming suddenly apoplectic, growing purplish about the gills and shaking with some silent and concealed emotion as he pounded his stick on the planks of the old dock. Then he swore softly, many times, and looked in the wake of the disappear-

ing vessel. A pensive shadow flitted across his leonine old eyes.

"Henery, as I 'm an old sinner, them be pirates — out an' out pirates!"

And again mirth overcame him, and he struggled with a tendency to choke, and wagged his head helplessly from side to side. Then he stopped and mopped his brow.

"And sech a day, Henery, sech a day!"

And still again the old stick smote the planks as his eye followed the gyrations of eight unwieldy sweep-oars, silhouetted against the glaring shimmer of the water.

The two old men slowly climbed the bank once more, puffing back to their seats under the shade of the maples.

"Pirates they be, Silas!" assented the other, almost sorrowfully. "Armed to th' teeth, an' a-lookin' for something to capture!"

He gazed regretfully after the odd little black craft. A leaf or two, untimely withered, drifted lazily down from the green boughs above their heads.

"Mind them days, Silas? Mind them days, when *we* was up to such jinks?" he asked, musingly.

"He-he-he! Do I mind em, Henery; do I mind 'em? Well, now, I guess I *ain't* forgittin' them doin's! An' d' you mind the time we captured little Katie Wilson, and were a-goin' to hold her for ransom? He-he-he!"

"That was a powerful energetic wallopin' old man Wilson was a-givin' us for it, too!"

There was a silence, and a song-sparrow sang thinly from one of the far-off maples.

"D' you mind, Silas, what a purty girl Katie was, them days?"

Cap'n Sands's hands were under the tail of his alpaca coat, and he sneezed boisterously.

"Yes, an uncommon purty girl, Katie! An' dead this twenty years, Henery, dead this twenty years!"

"You come and cut me out there, you old dog! Mind how she got mifty, 'bout my sayin' *she* was a purty poor-lookin' captive and ought to spruce up and wash some o' that taffy off'n her face!

"Mind, too, how she got just a leetle scart, first, when we captured her and were a-tellin' her she was goin' to be held for ransom? And what a power o' bawlin' she did a-fore we started feedin' her on horehound taffy?"

"Dead this twenty odd years, Silas!" repeated the other, reminiscently.

"That's so — that's so!" said Cap'n Steiner, softly, listening to the distant song-sparrow. "A purty girl, Katie!"

The two old heads wagged together, silently.

"Them were great days, Silas!"

Silas was thinking of certain things lost in the maze of old memories, and did not answer.

Then he looked down at the river once more, — the river that ran with so many memories for him, and the expression of his wrinkled old face changed again.

He leaned closer to his companion, and whispered something in his ear, — something at which Cap'n Sands chuckled and shook, even while wagging his head disapprovingly.

"Ain't we just a leetle on in years for them sort o' jinks, Silas?" he asked, in mild dissent.

For answer he was given a playful dig in the ribs.

"Tut! tut! What's an odd year or two? It 'd limber us up a bit, Henery!"

"Mebbe!" said the other, weakly.

"Think we ain't spry enough?"

"*I* ain't known a bed of sickness this twenty-eight years past, Silas Steiner!" retorted the other. Cap'n Steiner, what with his rheumatism and his mid-winter bronchitis, could make no such boast. But his spirit was indomitable.

"Then let's git after them young rapscallions!"

"A purt-e-e-ee hot day, ain't it, Silas?" was the other's last feeble objection, as Cap'n Steiner linked an arm through his own and the two hobbled hastily and yet secretively across the Common, and with numerous sly diggings of ribs and holding of sides crept down Thames Street.

Once inside Cap'n Steiner's front gate, they circled cautiously through the shadowy orchard, like two guilty children, dodging from tree to tree and finding it no easy matter to sneak past the coldly inquisitive eye of Miss Arabella, busy gathering a mess of butter-beans for the Widow Starbottle, from the Captain's trim little garden.

Just at the foot of this garden, which sloped gently down to the river's edge, the old

Captain kept that one stanch and trusty friend, his rowboat. Year after year it remained a vivid and spotless green, painted twice a season by his own scrupulous hand. Just why it was called the Katie Wilson, however, none of the younger generation of Chamboro ever knew. That was a thing of many years ago, an echo of old and far-off affairs, unknown to the busy adventurers of a ruthless present.

They only knew that it was in this rowboat that the cheery old Captain, every Sunday afternoon when the weather was fine, made his way for a laborious mile and a half up the river, to Colonel Taylor's place, where the two old-timers sat in the summer-house and partook smackingly of a bottle of the Colonel's well-aged port wine, reputed to have mellowed in a carefully guarded cellar since the time the Taylor family first came out to the New World.

On his little landing-wharf, of two spotlessly painted planks, Cap'n Steiner took off and folded up very neatly his white alpaca coat. This he tucked away carefully in the bow of the boat, and beside it placed even more care-

fully that ponderous old muzzle-loader from which more than one Chamboro youth of predatory tendencies had tasted the bitter sting of rock-salt, mostly about early apple-time, — and especially when the Captain's graft of Brandywine Pears on his Strawberry Reds showed the right degree of succulence.

Then, with not a little caution, and some stiffness of limb, Cap'n Sands stepped into the Katie Wilson and dropped, perhaps a little unexpectedly, down into her comfortable wicker-backed stern seat.

"There we be!" cried Cap'n Steiner, leaping nimbly aboard. But the Katie Wilson was unused to such unlooked for agility. She careened and dipped, and for a critical moment held the old Captain balanced on his toes, apparently undecided whether to dive headlong into the water, or drop rather shamefaced down into his seat. Once comfortably settled, however, the green boat was pushed stealthily off from shore, and with a face that might almost be said to wear a scowl of dark and resolute purpose old Cap'n Sands gave a word or two of command, pulled the little tiller-cord, and swung their craft round in pursuit of that

undreaming demon of the deep, the Greyhound!

"The young limbs—he-he, we'll show 'em, eh, Silas!" he chuckled as he watched the steady and regular rise and fall of the other's neatly painted little green oars. "*We'll show 'em, egad!*"

A Grown-Up's Toast

I

Here's to each Girl of Long Ago,
Once loved, and lost, alack,
Just big enough, or bad enough,
To love a beggar back!

II

I toast the True Love, and the Last,
The Saintliest, and the Worst:
But here's to Her, across the years,
We kissed and loved the first!

CHAPTER XI

In which the Greyhound is ignominiously overhauled

DEVIOUSLY, and in dark ways, does Destiny move. Why was it, that serenest and quietest of days, under a dome of July's most tranquil azure, that there was no befriending voice to warn Mistress Pauline Augusta Persons of the danger that hung over her, of the calamity that awaited her?

Three times, that morning, she had been solemnly wedded to Curly Persons, the cocker spaniel, before an altar erected for the purpose behind the chicken-coop. After each ceremony she had generously taken her somewhat restive and altogether unimpressed bridegroom for an extended wedding-tour, around the block, in the gardener's wheelbarrow.

Then, tiring of courtship so one-sided, she had returned to her three dirty and battered dolls, and wandering down to that forbidden but well-loved pile of sawdust just below the ice-house, was happily engaged in conducting funeral services, crooning brokenly to

herself as she patted the last sod down over each of her sadly chipped and late-departed children.

While she still bent with much satisfaction over those three little mounds in the sawdust, and was carefully erecting a tombstone of cedar shingle to the memory of each of her lost ones, a pair of small but grotesquely tattooed arms were suddenly thrust round her plump waist, and a bold young pirate bore her struggling and kicking form to the deck of the waiting Greyhound.

"Push off, men!" cried the Captain, nervously, yet huskily, as he clambered over the bulwarks with considerable difficulty, Pauline Augusta being decidedly round and plump of figure.

Here at last was an adventure worthy of their steel. Here was something worth capturing. Pauline Augusta was the Mayor's daughter, and as such ought to bring a handsome sum in ransom money.

But they had not drifted out to midstream before that young lady began to realize just what was happening to her. As she beheld the Greyhound slowly glide farther away from

her home territory, and as she looked into the dark visages that surrounded her, she put two chubby hands up to her eyes and began to



BORE HER, STRUGGLING AND KICKING

bawl, and bawl with a vigor that startled and disconcerted even the bold pirates themselves.

The First Mate ran in alarm to the pro-

vision-chest and held temptingly out before her a large pot of currant jelly, and, what was to him, a heart-breaking slice of seedcake.

But still Pauline Augusta bawled. Then preserved cherries were shown her, and pickled walnuts were held closely under her nose, that she might perchance smell of their deliciously pungent odor, and forget her tears. But still she bawled, louder than before.

It was no time for half measures. The Second Mate was for putting her in irons, and locking her down in the cabin. But the First Mate was of the opinion she would begin breaking things there, and like as not eat everything up on them; and then where would they be? — especially if they had to stand a long pursuit, or the ransom was n't paid right off!

The crew looked furtively up and down the river. It was a dangerous game they were playing.

"Here, you," said the Captain, in desperation. "We 're pirates, and if you don't stop that yellin' we 'll hang your father! Then we 'll hang your mother, as well; and if that don't do any good, we 'll hang the servant girl,

and the gardener, and the — the whole lot o' you!"

"Better hang *her*, and right now!" growled Pud Jones.

At that Pauline Augusta broke out with renewed vigor. Her lusty cries went echoing from bank to bank, and soon brought wondering women to open doorways, and barking dogs to the water's edge, and open-mouthed children to the top of the river slope.

The Captain gazed up and down the river, for once nettled and undecided.

"I guess, men, we 'd better make for Rankin's Woods," he said, hesitatingly, looking with troubled eyes at the weeping figure of Pauline Augusta.

"O-o-o-h! O-o-o-oh! I wish I was home! I want to go home!" bawled the frightened child perversely.

"An' I wish you was home too!" said the Captain, devoutly.

For who ever heard of a captive carrying on in that silly way? There was n't a pirate story ever written that had any bawling in it! And Lonely tried to explain to her that on the payment of two thousand dollars in gold she

was to be promptly handed over to her parents once more. He even intimated, for her further comfort, that any dastard that spoke in aught but gentle words to her should promptly swing from a yardarm.

All this Pauline Augusta in no way understood; but while she was wearing her grief away, and was beginning to smell with slightly more attentive nose at the many delectable things with which her captors had surrounded her, the old town of Chamboro was left in the well-churned wake of the Greyhound, and the midsummer loneliness of the upper river lay before them.

Suddenly one of the panting rowers dropped his oar.

"Say, you, we 're bein' chased!" he cried, shrilly. And twenty-two round and startled eyes were turned in the direction of his gaze, where the nose of a familiar-looking green boat crept slowly out from the nearest point.

"Why, there 's Grandpa Steiner!" said one of the oarsmen, weakly.

Pauline Augusta's expiring sobs were completely stilled. All eyes watched the green boat intently.

"An' there's old Cap'n Sands!" cried Pinkie Ball, with openly disturbed countenance.

"Say, Lonely, don't you think they 're after us?" asked one of the crew, irreverently, of his Captain.

"Order, there, men!" thundered the Captain; still looking out of the tail of his eye, however, at the approaching green boat.

"I say we sneak for Rankin's Woods," suggested Redney McWilliams.

The Captain pulled his hat lower over his brow, and looked at his men with unspeakable scorn. A fine idea had come to him.

"If this ship is goin' to be taken, there's only one thing to do! She's got to be scuttled, and sent to the bottom!"

It sounded so grandiloquently fine that for a moment or two it smothered all criticism.

"Aw, what's the use o' talkin' that way, Lonely? Did n't we have to pay three dollars for her — and sweat precious hard for it, too — and have n't we been workin' hard enough riggin' her up, ever since?"

It was Piggie Brennan who lodged this sincere but unofficial complaint.

"Don't brandy words with me!" retorted the Captain, with great dignity. "Brandy," as a verb, was one of those words peculiarly his own.

"And where 'll we git hold of another boat?" demanded Biff Perkins.

"And think of all that good grub bein' wasted!" dolefully went on Piggie Brennan.

Several craven spirits even dropped their oars, and attempted to desert their posts.

"Stand by your oars!" roared the Captain, as loudly as an uncommonly tight belt would permit. And one by one the crew went reluctantly back. In the mean time, foot by foot, the green boat was bearing down on them.

"Stand by there, Greyhound!" cried a shrill old voice suddenly.

How Captain and crew thrilled with something that was more than mere fear at those wonderful and historic-sounding words, — "Stand by there!" — How many a Spanish Main skipper had hearkened to the same dire command, in days gone by! It was worth going through, even though they *were* captured and bound, in the end, thought Lonely, with his keen sense for dramatic values. He

strode grandly back and forth on his cabin roof, intoxicated with the magnificence of the situation.

"Now, men," he cried, with airy defiance, his hand on his hip, "now, men, show 'em a clean pair o' heels!"

And eight anxious-eyed youngsters doubled up and tugged at their oars until eight small faces were a uniform crimson.

"It's all right for you up there to talk that way, Lonely O'Malley, but I tell you I'm gittin' water-blisters!" complained the rebellious Dode Johnson, between strokes.

"Together, men!" cried Lonely, drunkenly, inwardly bemoaning the craven spirit of his crew.

"If *you* was doin' a little of this rowin', you would n't feel so gay!" said Biff Perkins, sulkily.

"Stand by there, Greyhound, or we'll put a ball into you!" cried the pursuers once more.

"Say, Piggie, do you think they're just foolin'?" asked one of the crew, a little tremulously. Piggie was busy with the pump, and did not have breath to answer.

By this time the enemy was alongside. For the first time the Captain and crew of the Greyhound saw that the privateer was really and truly armed.

"Say, Lonely, had n't we better pull down that silly skull and cross-bones?" suggested Billie Steiner.

"Remember your oaths, men!" was the Captain's unrelenting reply.

The crew of the Greyhound would have fled in a body, had flight been possible. As it was, eight stalwart seamen stopped rowing, and looked with unhappy eyes at the enemy on their gunwale.

"Prepare for boarding!" said old Cap'n Steiner, hoarsely.

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered Cap'n Sands.

The green nose of the Katie Wilson bumped the sturdy side of the Greyhound amidships, whereat the entire crew of the latter bolted for their cabin, locking themselves securely in and peering with anxious faces from the little square window in its side.

Cap'n Sands made use of the crook in his walking-stick as a boarding-iron, while his fellow privateer made fast the little boat. Then

the two old men climbed none too nimbly on board. It had been a stiff row, and the noonday sun hung hot and relentless over the quiet river.

Together the boarding party of two saluted, gravely and gallantly.

Captain Lonely O'Malley of the good ship Greyhound gazed indignantly after his cowardly crew.

"Cow'rdy custards!" he muttered, under his breath. Then he turned to his captors, with his arms folded over his chest.

"Well, sirs, what will you?" he demanded, drawing the peak of his cap down, and himself up. That, he remembered, was always the way they said it.

"This good ship, sir, by right of capture!" answered Cap'n Steiner, saluting once more.

"And also this fair lady!" added Cap'n Sands, with an irrepressible titter, turning pompously to Pauline Augusta, who stood looking on, with slightly distended mouth.

"And two thousand bars of Spanish gold!" added the other old Captain.

The master of the Greyhound flushed with embarrassment.

"I guess we ain't got any gold," he confessed, bashfully. "But there 's pickled walnuts and jelly!"

Piggie Brennan, meanwhile, repenting of his flight, had edged back to his Captain, and stood with woe-begone face at the thought of such confiscation.

The two old sea-dogs went forward to consult.

"By gad, Silas, I 'm a-thinkin' *we* never did that thing better, in our own day!"

It was Cap'n Sands who spoke thus magnanimously.

Cap'n Steiner was rubbing a barked leg, ruefully. He was feeling too peevish, at the moment, to agree with the statement.

Far away, a long mile down the hot river, the one o'clock whistle sounded from the sawmill. It was like a school-bell to the ears of truants.

The two old Captains started up, and looked at each other half guiltily.

"And Miss Ar'bella is gittin' to be that naggy-minded, when I 'm a bit late for dinner!" Cap'n Steiner lamented.

"And me, egad, with Lawyer Martin to see

about that new Rankin lease!" said Cap'n Sands, unhappily.

"Better be pikin' back, had n't we, Henery?"

"I guess we had, Silas, guess we had! But it *does* come kind o' hard, leavin' all this *booty!*"

Then Captain Lonely O'Malley of the Greyhound strode forward with a suggestion to make. Insomuch as the lady they carried as captive was the daughter of the Mayor of Chamboro, and was being held for a ransom of two thousand dollars in gold (and had already eaten forty cents' worth of provisions since coming on board, interposed Piggie Brennan), they, the Captain and crew of the Greyhound, were willing to surrender to their captors all claim to this said lady, on condition that no member of the crew of the said Greyhound should suffer aught of curtailment of his natural life or liberty!

This, after some show of reluctance, was impatiently agreed to, and Captain O'Malley retired to draw up the necessary paper.

The two old sea-dogs and Pauline Augusta clambered down into the little green boat,

each and all of them thinking sordidly of dinner, rather than of further adventures on the high seas.



A PAPER, SIGNED IN RED

They were just on the point of casting off when the commander of the Greyhound appeared on deck, sucking his arm. In his hand he held a paper, signed in red, which he gravely handed down to Cap'n Steiner.

And even then Cap'n Steiner did n't seem to remember and understand. He was, in fact, beginning to feel uncommonly tired and cross.

"It has to be signed, sir," explained the commander of the Greyhound. "Has to be signed, in blood!"

"Oh, be off with you — you young rapscallion!" said Cap'n Sands, irascibly, for he too was beginning to feel strange aches and pangs. "Be off with you, you young limb!" Then he added fretfully: "I tell you, Silas, I 'm a-goin' to be a hull hour and a half late for dinner!"

Going home he settled back more comfortably in the stern seat, and tried to get a bit of a cat-nap, lulled by the ripple of the water against the drifting green bow of the little boat.

"I guess we *do* be a leetle on in years, mebbe, for them kind o' jinks," said Cap'n Steiner, plaintively, tugging and puffing at his oars.

"Jus' a leetle on in years!" he repeated, with a ponderous sigh, as they drew in under the cool and heavy shadows of the old sycamores.

A Sermon for the Very Young

I

If the Adam in us ordains
That we can't be eternally good,
Then let us be kindly at least, my son,
As devil or saint, we should!

II

Tho' the best of us wander at times
From the path that is narrow and straight,
To be honest in Sin, as in Saintliness, sir,
Wipes a half of it off the slate!

CHAPTER XII

In which the Biter is somewhat bitten

THE pirates of Watterson's Creek sat about the deck of the Greyhound, moodily flinging apple-cores into the stream. Their last ounce of mullein-leaf and Indian tobacco had been smoked away. A spirit of unrest had crept over the idle and impatient crew, as they waited the return of Pinkie Ball. That worthy had volunteered to purloin from an unsuspecting mother's sewing-room a whole rattan rocking-chair, which, carefully unwoven and cut up, ought to supply the crew of the Greyhound with smoking-material for at least a week to come.

The pirates had been on an extended and enervating cruise of several hours, up the river, and were now anchored in midstream, as a precautionary measure against sudden attack, just above the shadow of the old railway bridge. A long and wavering line of cores, punctuated here and there by malignantly pale watermelon rinds, drifted slowly down with

the languid current, and attested to the success of their raid on Farmer Quinn's apple orchard.

But still the pirates were unhappy. The Greyhound had not proved a success; and the rainbow tints had gone out of their piratical dreams. For a week eight sad-eyed small boys had been limping and crawling about Chamboro with the bent backs and the halting gait of octogenarians.

"The trouble with this old thing is," said Redney McWilliams, with considerable disgust, "she ain't got no speed!"

He spat through his teeth deliberately, on one of those little piles of sand which lay heaped upon the deck, with great forethought, against the time when the Greyhound's timbers might become slippery with blood.

"Rowin' ain't such fun, either!" added Biff Perkins, looking pensively at the water-blisters on his hands.

The Captain was deep in thought. That fact you could tell by the way his arms were folded across his chest, and by the unusually heavy scowl that darkened his freckled brow.

"Men," he said, presently, striding back

and forth while he spoke, "men, we 've got to have a *engine* for this ship!"

Eight oar-wielding galley-slaves sat up and gazed at one another in open-mouthed amazement. Of course; an engine was just the thing! Why had n't some one thought of it before? But doubts began to suggest themselves.

"Then we can have an awning put up," continued the Captain, airily, "and just sit there in the shade and go steamin' around and capture whatever we like. *Then* I guess we won't be hearin' so much about water-blisters and sore hands and all that stuff!"

Lonely had tried in vain, weeks before, to instill Spartan views into his crew. He had eloquently advised that they all harden themselves, first by sleeping on broken bricks, then by drinking only muddy water, and by eating things uncooked as often as possible.

"An' we could have a whistle, too, could n't we?" piped up little Binney Pennyfather, the youngest of the crew.

"Cert!" said the Captain.

"And could make a swell after us, like the Lone Star!"

"Course!" said the Captain.

That the Greyhound could ever leave a swell behind her was too much for the credulity of her labor-worn crew.

"Huh! that 's all nice enough, talkin' big that way! But where 's the engine comin' from?" demanded Billie Steiner.

"Where 'd these apples come from?" asked his laconic Captain.

"Off apple-trees," growled Billie. Then a spirit of gentle sarcasm crept over him. "Any of you fellows seen any steam-engines growin' on apple-trees up your way?"

Billie, together with the First Mate, had partaken somewhat too generously of unripe watermelon, and a dolorous stomach-ache tended to make him rather fretful.

"You ain't fit to be on a pirate ship!" said his worthy Captain.

"I wish I *was n't*!" retorted Billie.

"So do I," said the First Mate, dejectedly, as he returned from a fruitless inspection of the provision-chest.

"If there was something to *eat* about a steam-engine, I guess Piggie 'd be barkin' on the other side of the fence!" commented Pud Jones.

The only reply to this was an apple-core that stirred the turkey-feather stuck bristlingly in Pud 's pirate hat.

As the Captain strode perplexedly back and forth across his deck a familiar sound smote on his ears. He clambered up on his cabin roof, and peered down into the shimmering river-distance, with a face illumined.

It was the Lone Star, Chamboro's one permanent steamer, coughing and churning and wheezing upstream, with a small raft of logs at her heels.

And at the sight of her every member of that crew understood just what his Captain's thoughts had been! The Greyhound had found an enemy worthy of her mettle.

There was something intoxicating in the thought of ever taking a prize so ponderous. Yet every man on the Greyhound knew there was no other craft propelled by steam in those waters, — with the exception, of course, of the great excursion steamer that came up the river twice every week. But the excursion steamer, for the time being, at any rate, was out of the question.

"Golly, Lonely!" said Pud Jones, fasci-

nated and yet overawed at the thought, "ain't she a pretty big steamer for us kids to talk about capturin'?"

The pirate Captain looked down at the Lone Star contemptuously.

"We 've *got* to have her, men!" he said, relentlessly.

They saw the wheelsman push off from her in a punt, and scull about picking up loose logs, where his boom had disjointed.

This left only old Brown, the engineer, on board. Having rounded up his logs, the wheelsman sculled back to the tug, where the engineer stooped down over the gunwale and handed him a tin pail. Then he sculled briskly ashore, and disappeared through the doorway of Allen's Saloon.

Such a chance was too much for the Napoleonic soul of Captain Lonely O'Malley. He climbed down from his cabin, and with a determined hitch at his trousers stalked forward.

"Every man who 's for capturin' the Lone Star, this side!" he said, coldly, yet challengingly.

There was a moment of hesitation and doubt,

followed by a murmur of questioning admiration. Then one by one the entire crew of the Greyhound came over and stood exultingly beside their Captain. No pirate likes to be called a coward. But — well, they were in for it now, anyway.

Old Brown, the engineer of the Lone Star, was eating his frugal lunch from a wicker basket, on the starboard side of his little propeller, — as one might plainly see from the cant of her deck, for the worthy engineer was very fat. He was waiting, somewhat impatiently, for the return of the wheelsman and the tin pail. Then suddenly he thought he heard the creak of oars out in the river near by.

Without so much as rising from his seat, he twisted his head around the back corner of his smoke-stained little cabin.

As he thus exposed himself to the enemy, a flat-headed arrow, most carefully aimed, whistled past his right ear. And he beheld, at the same moment, a sight that almost made his honest blue eyes pop out.

For crawling up to him, right under the shadow of the Lone Star, was a long black

ship flying a skull and cross-bones, — a ship with eleven scowling men on her carefully sanded deck.

Old Brown, in fact, held a piece of cold boiled mutton in his hand, which he was in the very act of conveying to his mouth. Instead of this, he let it drop unnoticed on the deck floor of the Lone Star. For what man is going to be altogether self-possessed when he sees no less than seven key guns leveled at him?

"Stand by there an' surrender," cried a shrill and threatening young voice, "or we 'll blow you out of the water!"

The corpulent old engineer said nothing, but still looked at them with dazed and popping eyes. The next moment the teeth of the pirates' boarding-irons had fastened like wolf-fangs on the bulwarks of the helpless Lone Star.

It took but a second for the Captain, followed by his crew, to scramble aboard their prize.

"I told you it was easy enough," said the Captain, *sotto voce*, over his shoulder, "if you only take 'em unexpected!"

The pirates found it impossible to repress a cheer of victory, as they swarmed down the deck of the enemy.

It was then that the fat old engineer slowly wiped his mouth, and as slowly said something, under his breath, which ought not to be repeated. Lonely, at the moment, was hurriedly inspecting his new engine room. Then he turned to the enemy himself.

"Of course you 're captured?" he announced calmly, yet mercilessly.

"Yes, you 're captured!" cried the delirious pirate crew, surrounding him.

"Sure!" said the engineer, meekly, brushing the crumbs from his oily trousers-legs.

"Men, take possession!"

Then Captain O'Malley turned to the engineer once more, his forgotten gallantry coming back to him just in time.

"I 'm sorry, of course, but I guess we 'll have to take you in tow! They always do, you know!"

"Sure!" answered the engineer again, stretching himself with a fine assumption of unconcern, which even the pirate Captain could see through.

"Here, First Mate, swing the Greyhound round aft, while I throw you a line!"

The only line in sight was twenty feet or so of logging-chain. It was too much for the strength of the pirate Captain.

"Give you a hand, Cap'n?" mildly inquired the engineer, lighting up his pipe as he came forward.

"Thanks, yes," responded the pirate chief, with a loftiness of tone that all but took the old engineer's breath away.

"Keep an eye out, men, for treach'ry!" came the shrill cry of their leader, as he ordered his crew once more on board their ship.

But the warning was uncalled for, and somewhat regretted when once it was uttered, for with his own hand the resigned old engineer slipped the chain through the iron-cased hawse-hole of the Greyhound and made his tug fast to her stern.

As he climbed languidly on board again the wheelsman appeared, smoking a bilious-hued cheroot.

"What 's all this here monkey work mean?" he demanded angrily.

"Shh, Bill!" the engineer cried, holding up



YOU 'RE CAPTURED! CRIED THE DELIRIOUS PIRATE CREW

a warning finger. "We 're *captured*, man, can't you see?"

Then he said something to the wheelsman which the pirates on board the Greyhound could not hear. But they saw the wheelsman nod his head, slowly and dejectedly. He, too, they hoped, was going to take his medicine like a man.

Then the wheelsman went forward, still wagging his head, and slipped his bow-line off the pile to which he had tied. The next minute the pirates heard the sharp "cling-cling" of the engine-room signal-bell.

"Now you 've got us, boys, go ahead!"

It was the old engineer speaking, with his oily head stuck out of his little blackened doorway.

Even as he spoke his hand went up to the lever, and a moment later the screw of the Lone Star was threshing the water and she was swinging briskly out to midstream.

The pirate crew stood in petrified amazement. Then they came slowly to their senses, and tried in vain to cast off the chain that held them. In vain they wielded their hatchets on the heavy links of iron. In vain

the Captain argued for the prompt and efficient sinking of the Greyhound. In vain they exhausted their ammunition on the paintless and imperturbable stern-boards of their captor.

Right down through the heart of Chamboro, where men and women and children, standing on the bridges, and docks, and river-banks, beheld and laughed at their ignominious helplessness, right down past Ellis's Brick Yard and the upper Lime Kiln they were towed, three good miles from their anchorage.

"Now, row back, you thievin' young rowdies! Row back, and mebbe that 'll sweat some o' these gay pirit notions out o' you!"

And the Lone Star cast off, and bustled unconcernedly down about her own private business, whistling a final brazen taunt as she rounded a shadowy bend and disappeared from sight.

Forbidden Ground

When we were young, and small, and bad,
We mostly spent our time in
Our neighbors' orchards, though we had
Our own fruit-trees to climb in;
We knew 't was wrong, and so were glad:
That fact, sir, lay the crime in!

To do the thing that's wrong seems Law,
Law we, and Adam, found it!
The chamber Bluebeard's wife ne'er saw,
Oh, how she longed to sound it!
And how life's colts eat buckwheat straw
With eight-railed fences round it!

Those dreams for which we search and bleed
Are things of untold blisses;
The love we always want and need
Is the love one loses, misses;
The dearest lips are those, indeed,
That never knew our kisses!

CHAPTER XIII

In which Youth is stripped of its Glory

NOT a breeze was stirring. The afternoon was hot and humid and opalescent. The last crumb in the Greyhound's provision-chest had long since been made away with. Never before had the current of the languid old river seemed so relentless, so indomitable, so doggedly unflagging.

The crushed and broken Captain had even suggested that he speed home by land, and return secretly with Plato and a clothes-line or two, that the Greyhound might be towed back to her anchorage after the fashion of the more humble and decorous canal-boat. But the mutinous crew would have none of this demeaning method of locomotion. The Greyhound could do what she liked. They were going swimming.

The disconsolate pirates of Watterson's Creek got only as far as the lower town swimming-hole. Here, after a brief but bitter battle, with missiles taken aboard for the pur-

pose at the Brick Yard, the rightful possessors of that hole were sent scuttling ashore, to become united to their wearing apparel later, behind any friendly shrubbery and any convenient fence-boards that might offer.

The victors swung the Greyhound in under one of the big elms, canopied and festooned with wild grapevines, and there made her fast.

Then they stripped, to a man, in her little cabin. Piggie Brennan alone was somewhat tardy about removing his shirt, having discovered that the heat of battle had taken the color out of sundry mysterious little pieces of hair-ribbon carried gallantly in his bosom, and being anxious to avoid explanation as to how numerous vivid blue and crimson spots chanced to adorn his unusually fair skin.

Then one by one the boys "took their duck," diving in rapid succession from the rudder-stem of the Greyhound, cutting the surface crisply, gasping and blowing and shaking dripping heads as they emerged from the cool yellow depths of the shaded water.

Then their new-born energy took the form of a game of follow-the-leader, consisting of

gleeful plungings from the cabin roof, "bringing up bottom," "treading water," and "parting the hair." Tiring of this, in time, the eleven young disciples of piracy drifted down to the swimming-hole itself. Here they had a game of squat tag, on land, only stopping to shriek and dance and gyrate, shamelessly and in unison, as the excursion steamer appeared round the bend and raced imperturbably past.

Then they made a water-slide in the bank of blue clay, down which they tobogganed, feet first, flat on their backs. This clay was not of the purest, however, having certain small but sharp-angled pieces of flint running generously through it. One slide, and one only, proved sufficient for each member of the Greyhound's crew.

Then a goodly puddle of blue clay ooze was deftly kneaded into existence. This was joyously applied to eleven naked young bodies, until those children of sober Chamboro looked sadly like eleven expatriated South Sea Islanders.

Then came the embellishing and ornamental phase, which with one pirate consisted in making cryptic crosses and circles on all parts of

his anatomy; with another, zebra-like stripes from head to foot; with another, a close-grained effect such as one often sees on quartered oak furniture; with still another a copious sprinkling of French knots and polka-dots.

Back-aches and water-blisters, disappointments and humiliations, defeats and degradations, — all were forgotten under the magic spell of that soothing and caressing blue clay, and that dissolving, rejuvenating, lukewarm, yellow-tinted water of the sun-steeped swimming-hole. Cæsar took no thought of his crown; Antony had discovered something sweeter than ambition; Ponce de Leon had found something finer than Mexican gold! — the very fountain of youth and joy itself!

When tired of disporting themselves, porpoise-like, under and through and over the water, the eleven young barbarians clambered up the river-bank, to a warm and dusty sand-wallow, soaking in the gentle heat, at peace with themselves and all the world.

There, with twitching toes and blinking eyes, gazing lazily up into the great blue vault above them, they fell into a dreamy and disjointed argument as to just where Heaven was.

Then they digressed to gentle speculations as to the nature of the Hereafter, and whether or not there were real angels, and just what persons in Chamboro had ever seen a ghost. And were there such things as witches, and what was a sure cure for warts?

Yet even while these eleven brooding philosophers lay disporting themselves in the warm afternoon sunlight, sans scowls, sans firearms, sans clothing, sans watch or outlook — whilst, I repeat, these eleven contented and motionless figures lay heavily incased in a shell of blue clay, stretched out, gazing up at the unfathomable sky and waiting for that earthly pigment to harden and whiten about their youthful ribs, the rotund figure of none other than the town constable of Chamboro was being rowed to the very nose of the Greyhound, silently and cautiously, by a stalwart scion of the Chamboro Boat-House.

And while those eleven pensively happy spirits still lay stretched out on the sand-bank, still blinking at the sky about which they had been holding metaphysical question, the bowline of their gallant ship was noiselessly untied and taken possession of, and in three minutes

the Greyhound herself was slipping silently around the river-bend, gliding out of sight insubstantially, like the shadow of a dream.

It was Pud Jones, returning to the Greyhound for matches, who, white of face and round of eye, first reported the loss.

"Hi, there, you fellas!" he screamed down at the idling dreamers; "*somebody's pinched our boat!*"

Alarming and unhappy indeed was the half-hour that followed. In vain the pirate crew scurried overland to the road fence, and with much shouting and gesticulating from behind screening shrubbery, tried to stop some passing farm-wagon. Binney Pennyfather, the most youthful of the unfortunates, even began to cry and wish that he was dead.

It was Captain O'Malley alone who rose to the occasion. He quickly, though somewhat rudely, wove for himself a skirt of wild grapevines. This, after many mishaps and disappointments, he fastened gingerly about his waist.

At a costume so Adamical the entire pirate crew suddenly forgot their woes, and, seeing that he was adding to their joy in life, Lonely

promptly fell to showing off, dancing an improvised skirt-dance for their delectation.

"I 'd rather go stark naked 'n cut a figger



AN IMPROVISED SKIRT-DANCE

like that!" solemnly declared the First Mate, as their derisive shouts of laughter died forlornly away. For with the lowering sun came a greater coolness of air, and sadly and

poignantly the pirates of Watterson's Creek learned what a helpless and dependent animal is man, in the natural state.

What, eventually, would have become of those eleven mud-smeared young savages, left thus unconsciously destitute, it would be hard to say, had not the Lone Star come churning and puffing and grunting once more up the river, with a scow-load of red brick for the new Chamboro courthouse.

The fat old engineer happened to hear their sudden woeful chorus of cries — indeed, they could have been heard two good miles away, through the quiet and cooling evening air. Poking his astonished head out of his warm little engine-room, he beheld eleven gaunt, grayish-hued figures huddled forlornly about a tiny fire on the breezy river-bank. He had to look several times, before he could quite make them out, for the remnants of their blue-clay coating tended to give them both an unfamiliar and an uncouthly exotic appearance.

If that sight awoke in his honest and generous old soul any stray sign or sense of merriment, he thoughtfully had his laugh out alone, in the quietness of his engine-room,

before swinging round and taking those eleven forlorn passengers aboard.

"My cookie-pie!" was his solitary though forceful ejaculation, as he packed the lot of them down in his warm little engine-room, where they sat apprehensively, and in melancholy silence, pondering over just what ultimate fate that day had in store for them. From the Captain himself the old-time hauteur of the pirate had fallen, — for what is there imposing about even the boldest buccaneer, when seen without frill or furbelow!

As the Lone Star swung slowly into Rankin's Dock that night eleven silhouetted heads gazed anxiously out from the ruddy doorway of her engine-room.

Most of the town of Chamboro seemed crowded about the little wharf, dotted with lights, where many of the noisy throng carried lanterns. Men and women, together with small children who ought to have been abed hours before, stood grouped about a dark, low-lying mysterious form that swung in the water just under the nose of the Lone Star.

That mysterious form bore the ponderous official padlocks of the Corporation of Cham-

boro. And there it had been securely chained and imprisoned by that corporation's constable, after which solemn act he had plodded stolidly off to a belated supper, with lips pursed up in sphinx-like silence, quite satisfied with a hard day's work well done.

But as the evening had crept on certain stern fathers grew restive, and more than one anxious-eyed mother seemed paler of face than before. A boy's straw hat had been found floating on the river. Wild rumors suddenly began to creep through the town. Some one had heard loud screams, down below Ellis's Brick Yard; a capsized boat had been seen!

One by one families came out to talk it all over. Then a voice from the crowd suggested going up to Aleck Brown's for the dragging-irons, and a muffled sob or two broke involuntarily from the throat of more than one woman waiting on the little wharf.

It was just at this point that the Lone Star came puffing importantly up, and from her engine-room was first seen that strange group of disheveled and bobbing heads.

Fathers who had been meekly ruminating as to how they had misunderstood their young

sons, who had been thinking how much good there really had been in this or that particular boy, and how much more forbearing they ought to have been in the old days, suddenly grew worldly and cold and hard-hearted. And women who had been very quiet, and had said nothing, could no longer keep back the foolish tears.

Then the melodiously austere voice of the Reverend Ezra Sampson, the Rector of All Saints, sounded out above the murmur of the crowd.

He was, obviously, addressing the phlegmatic old engineer of the Lone Star.

"Mr. Brown, can it be possible, sir, that those are *our* boys, whom you have thus strangely secreted in your engine-room?"

"They be!" answered Mr. Brown, not over-pleased at the Rector's tone of voice. "They be — the whole kit of 'em!"

At that precise moment the Rector of All Saints caught a fleeting glimpse of what appeared to be his son, Lionel Clarence — more commonly known among his comrades of late as "Shag," or sometimes as "Slugger" Sampson. It was only fitting, as the leader

of his flock, that Lionel's father should sternly take the initiative.

"Lionel Clarence Sampson, come here at once, sir!" the stern parent demanded.

There was no answer to this, and after a moment's ominous silence the command was repeated.

"Obey your father, Lionel, whatever the outcome, or however painful it may be for you," called Mrs. Sampson, who had been weeping a little toward the last.

"Do you mean that, ma'm?" asked the old engineer, pointedly.

"Certainly she means it, my good man!" It was the Rector who now spoke, a little impatiently. But still no boy appeared.

"Shall I fetch 'im, ma'm?" gleefully suggested the old engineer.

"No, he must come of his own free will!"

"Mebbe!" said Mr. Brown, softly, "mebbe!"

"Lionel Clarence Sampson, come out from your hiding-place at once, sir, and receive that chastisement which you have so richly merited!"

There was another painful silence, and then

a tremulous and whining voice was heard to say:

"Pa, I — I can't! We ain't — we are n't — *You* tell him, Mr. Brown!"

The old engineer stepped slowly over and whispered something in the ear of the Rector.

"Sir?" ejaculated the Preacher.

Thereat the engineer repeated what he had said.

At this the Preacher put up his hands; then, recovering his official dignity, whispered something in turn into the ears of those close beside him. Then there was more whispering, and only the men remained in the front ranks of the watchers, while messengers were sent hurriedly and mysteriously to all quarters of the little town of Chamboro.

Long before their return, however, old Cap'n Sands and the Lone Star engineer had had a little private talk. This resulted in the old Cap'n's valiantly setting at defiance all municipal authority, and with his own incensed hand chopping down the padlocked cabin door of the Greyhound, declaring in no uncertain language, as he did so, that a certain fat-headed old constable was n't fit to herd she-goats!

But most of the older heads of Chamboro did not take the old Cap'n's view of the case. For more than one parent sternly and promptly boarded the Lone Star, and finding a son in that altogether too tempting state of preparedness, spanked him vigorously, soundly, and publicly.

Yet the cruelest blow fell on Captain Lonely O'Malley himself. That worthy buccaneer, emerging from the engine-room, was kicked at inadequately by an inebriate father, only to escape into the arms of a tearful young mother, who seized him bodily and held him to her breast. In vain Lonely struggled and remonstrated; in vain he wriggled and twisted, hot and tingling with the disgrace of such an exhibition. Still that young mother held him and wept over him, wept over him, indeed, as though he had been an infant in arms!

And from Rankin's Dock that night eleven bold pirates went home through the noisy streets of Chamboro; some with aching hearts, all with aching legs. With the passing of those little aches, for eleven redoubtable youths the romance passed out of piracy. From that time

on all such adventuring faded into the light of common day. And for all time, henceforth, it was ordained that one more door to the kingdom of enchantment should stand barred and locked to them.

The Child who Tarried Not

A bird of passage on the wing
You proved to us alone!
Where now, in their far wandering,
Have those light pinions flown?

And yet you filled all life with song,
For one too happy day!
Then over seas, where you belong,
You winged your lonely way!

How could we know, O Child, you stayed
A momentary guest,
Whose fond but fleeting presence made
These lonely walls their rest?

For, since you fared from us again
One note our Aprils lack,
One note, as year by year in vain
We watch the birds come back!

CHAPTER XIV

In which, at last, we find a Hero

ILL-ADVISED, for many a week to come, was the man who mentioned piracy within the four gates of Chamboro.

Not that Lonely and his followers lost all that ancient and timeless exuberance of animal spirits which clings eternally to youth, — as the fire in the Barrisons' stable-loft, and the blowing up of old Witherspoon's garden wheelbarrow, with gunpowder, eloquently enough testified.

But in Chamboro, just between early harvest apple-time and the muskmelon season, there was one particular spot round which the thoughts and fancies of the boy-mind invariably and ever wistfully centred.

This spot was Cap'n Steiner's orchard. For in that well-guarded little riverside domain bloomed the one tree of Chamboro's forbidden fruit, a strange and legendary thing, of more than earthly trunk and leaves, which made the old Captain's high board fence, mili-

tantly surmounted by a many-pronged barbed wire, seem strangely like the wall which once shut the children of Adam out of the Garden of Eden.

Some thirty years ago, while pottering about among his fancy fruit-trees, Cap'n Steiner had made an experiment. On a bough of one of his vigorous young Strawberry Reds he had grafted the sprig of a Brandywine pear. Then he had carefully bound up the wound with grafting-wax and a piece of Miss Arabella's old flannel petticoat — Arabella, in those days, the older men held, was rarely comely and rosy-cheeked — and waited somewhat doubtfully for the outcome.

The strange marriage of aliens was an unlooked-for success. The Strawberry Red took kindly to the Brandywine pear, and before so many years had slipped away the good people of Chamboro beheld a wonder growing up in their very midst, a miraculous tree, one side of which bore abundant harvests of Strawberry Red apples, while the boughs of the other side were weighed down with a succulent wealth of Brandywine pears.

Nor was this all. Into the mellow and lus-

cious mealiness of the one strangely blended and mingled the buttery and melting juices of the other, so that for years the divided youth of Chamboro had disputed as to which was finer, the Brandywines from the south side, or the Strawberry Reds from the north side. These arguments were always accompanied by much pensive smacking of lips, and year in and year out many a young mouth had watered at vivid descriptions of old Cap'n Steiner's forbidden fruit.

Due word of this wondrous tree set Lonely O'Malley to thinking. In time these continuously rapt and highly embellished recountals even prompted him to action.

But there were difficulties. For twenty years and more, every boy in the village had nursed designs on old Cap'n Steiner's apples. Men who were growing slightly bald still rubbed their vests and told ruefully how near, such and such a night, they came to getting a hatful of the old fellow's Strawberry Reds. So powerful a magnet had this tree stood to predaceous youth that the old Captain had grown schooled in craft, and in time had learned all the arts and tricks and dodges of his besiegers.

Now, town tradition undeviatingly held, the old Captain sat at an open window throughout the month of August, with a spy-glass in one hand and a shot-gun loaded with rock salt in the other. There were signal wires, too, the town boys said, running mysteriously into the house, where so much as the touch of an intruding foot rang a little alarm-bell and brought forth the owner and the shot-gun.

All this did not serve to discourage Lonely. If anything, it only tended to make him more fixed in purpose. He first spent several afternoons in reconnoitring, guardedly exploring the fence and prodding about for possible loopholes. None was to be found; so, foiled here, he resorted to strategy.

He dug up and washed a goodly sized bunch of horse-radish, and, placing this neatly in the bottom of a basket, boldly opened the great, sagging front gate, and as boldly went down the dilapidated old board-walk. He wore, as he did so, his meekest and most wistful look of innocence.

But close beside his straight and narrow path he noticed a score or two of mellow red astra-

chans, still lying seductively ruddy against the dark green of the orchard grass.

The temptation was too much for Lonely. He side-stepped nimbly in under the tree,



WITH A SPY-GLASS AND A SHOT-GUN

and, looking furtively about to see that he was unobserved, quickly thrust four of the finest apples down into his blouse-front.

Then he went on his way, innocently and calmly whistling his cheery discords. He stopped only when he found himself confronted by the suspicious and belligerent eye of Miss Arabella. Even then he did not quail, only he remembered, at the time, that certain small girls in the village, holding Miss Arabella to be a witch, always passed her with crossed fingers and scuttled away at her threatened approach.

"I was wonderin' if you 'd like to buy some horse-radish?" Lonely looked back at her boldly, thrusting up one shoulder and squinting blandly, although his sharp eyes had already caught sight of an immense hedge of horse-radish not a hundred yards away from him, against the east fence.

"Stop that squintin'!" said Miss Arabella, in a shrilly stentorian voice.

"Yes, ma'm!" said Lonely, meekly.

"An' stop hunchin'!"

"Yes, ma'm!" answered the boy, steadying himself up against the cistern pump.

"Now, are n't you Lonely O'Malley?" demanded the old lady suspiciously.

The boy nodded, wondering what was to come next. He was hoping, as sometimes had happened, that it might be a slice of bread and butter, with peach jam on it.

Miss Arabella looked at the basket, and sniffed aloud.

"You 're Lonely O'Malley, are you? Then you just get out of this orchard, as fast as them young legs can carry you!"

Lonely's jaw dropped in sheer astonishment.

"Travel now!" she cried, "or I 'll Lonely O'Malley you!"

And with a celerity quite unexpected in one of her years Miss Arabella reached in through the open door, and made after the fleeing Lonely with a broom.

Now, the less designing type of boy would have bolted for the gate. But Lonely had not accomplished his purpose; and having the utmost confidence in his dodging and sprinting ability, he made audacious tracks for the river, circling well in through the orchard and keeping a sharp look-out for one partic-

ular tree, the Strawberry Red. In this way, pursued by the irate maiden lady, he made three fleet tours of the orchard, during each circuit audaciously picking up a red astrachan and storing it away in his blouse.



PURSUED BY THE IRATE MAIDEN LADY

Then he dodged aside and slipped out through the gate. A minute or two later he heard it slammed and locked after him. He had not discovered the forbidden fruit, but a new thought had come to him. The way to storm his enemy's position was obviously from the water-front.

He spent the

rest of the next morning along the river-bank, just above the old Captain's orchard. There, while looking over the ground and perfecting his plans, he came unexpectedly upon Pauline Augusta Persons, sailing chip-boats at the river-edge.

"You'd better get home out o' this!" he commanded, scowling darkly down at her. "Git!" he repeated.

Pauline Augusta, beholding her old-time enemy thus threatening her, fled pell-mell to the near-by shelter of a clump of burdocks, amid which she pushed and squatted, quite motionless, somewhat after the fashion of a very young robin. Her enemy scowled over toward her once or twice; but vaster concerns preoccupied his mind. A raft of elm logs lay close in to the shore, waiting for the screaming mill-saw to rip them up into two-inch planks. Watching his chance, when the mill-men were away at dinner, he quietly loosened the piece of logging-chain which held the lower end of the boom, and then silently poled the raft down-stream. Opposite the upper corner of the old Captain's orchard he worked it close in to the bank again, making it fast to a young willow.

Before him lay the open Garden of Eden, the garden wherein grew the forbidden fruit, and wherein lurked, he grimly reminded himself, a very shrill-voiced serpent. The logs drifted down the languid current and filled up the boom space. One escaping truant he rescued just in time. Then he made sure that the others were safe, calmly studying his would-be course, should his escape prove a hurried one.

Finally he stept ashore, and crawled up the grassy bank that sloped so gently down to the water's edge. Here, he felt, was an adventure worthy of his steel.

Lonely looked about, gopher-like, dropping flat on his stomach as the side door of the Captain's house opened. It was his one-time stay and support in things of the spirit, Miss Mehetabel Wilkins, bidding a voluble good-day to Miss Arabella.

When the coast was once more clear he crept as far as he dared up the sloping river-bank. There he studied the situation at closer range. Tree by tree, his squinting young eyes went over the orchard, until, at last, he caught sight of the forbidden fruit itself.

There stood the old tree, halfway between the Captain's trim little boat-landing and his wide-open back door.

On the one side Lonely could see the russet yellow of the Brandywine pears, on the other, the streaked crimson and yellow of the Strawberry Reds.

Then, after the fashion of all famous hunters and scouts, he dropped prone on the grass, face downward, and stealthily, foot by foot, wormed his circuitous way nearer and nearer the tree. At intervals he lay motionless, a brown spot on the parched brown of the open orchard grass. The busy rattle of dishes floated out to him, warning the intruder that Miss Arabella was "washing up." Then whiffs of the old Captain's pipe-smoke drifted lazily through an open window. The guinea-fowl down in the chicken-yard cluttered and screamed. The sawmill whistled for one o'clock.

As that brazen wail of sound died away, Lonely's arms closed about the rough trunk of the old Strawberry Red. The next second he was shinning nimbly up into its shadowy boughs.

He swung his lithe body across a comfortable-looking crotch, where he sat straddle and gazed in round-eyed wonder at the wealth about him, within reach of his hand, his to capture and devour, with only a few hornets buzzing appreciatively at one or two of the ripest pears.

"Yum! Yum!" said Lonely O'Malley aloud, in rapt anticipation.

First he tasted an apple. He tried to make the resulting smack inaudible, but that was out of the question. Never could one of the apples of the Hesperides have tasted sweeter on the lips of Hercules himself than did that Strawberry Red to the mouth of Lonely O'Malley. Never had he bitten rapturously into fruit like unto this of Cap'n Steiner's.

Then he tried a Brandywine pear. His eyes rolled up ecstatically, his lips clucked and smacked, as he licked the too opulent juices from his sticky fingers. He reached for another and then another, selecting those round which the hornets buzzed thickest, the ripest and sweetest and juiciest, going back to the apples once more, and still unable for the life

of him to decide which were the better, the Brandywines or the Strawberry Reds themselves.

Then something happened, something as unlooked for as it was disconcerting. This surprise took the form of Miss Arabella herself, calmly and methodically propping the back of Cap'n Steiner's old canvas camp-chair against the trunk of the tree in which Lonely sat perched. A moment later the old Captain himself appeared, and Miss Arabella went over to the side veranda for her rocking-chair.

The old Captain stretched himself out for his customary noonday nap. Miss Arabella put on her spectacles, opened her "Family Guardian," and asserted that she was ready for a good long spell o' reading before she was going to get settled down after that young varmint's leading her such a chase — the young whipper-snapper!

The young varmint and whipper-snapper at this pricked up his guilty young ears.

The old Captain, leaning back in his chair, swore softly behind his red bandanna, spread over his face to keep away the flies.

"The young limb!" he mumbled, wrathfully. "If I had him here! If I —"

"There's no use getting het up, Silas, about that boy. He ain't here, so what's the good o' swearing that way and saying what you'd do?"

Miss Arabella was on the point of continuing her discourse when a mealy Strawberry Red, falling apparently from its mother bough, smote her sharply on the head.

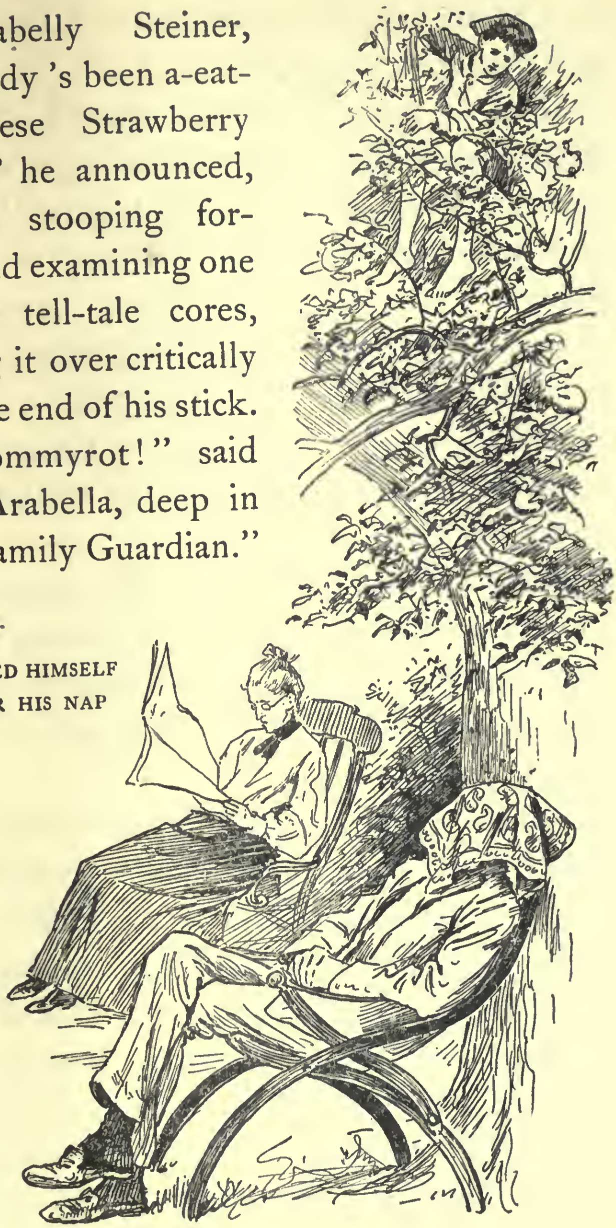
"Goodness gracious me!" said Miss Arabella, feeling the spot. "'Bout time this fruit was gettin' canned!"

But the irate old Captain sat up, waving his stick. He was about to enter into a detailed and impassioned account of what he *would* do, once the fit and proper occasion presented itself, when his eye chanced to fall on some half-dozen apple-cores lying scattered at his feet. His mouth remained open, but this time in silent wonder; and he looked from the tree to the cores, and from the cores back to the tree, and then at Miss Arabella.

Lonely, peering carefully down through the leafy shadows, could make out the strange look, but could not guess at its cause.

"Arabelly Steiner, somebody 's been a-eating these Strawberry Reds!" he announced, sternly, stooping forward and examining one of the tell-tale cores, turning it over critically with the end of his stick.

"Tommyrot!" said Miss Arabella, deep in her "Family Guardian."



STRETCHED HIMSELF OUT FOR HIS NAP

"Don't tommyrot me, ma'm! I say somebody's been at my tree!"

And in proof of his assertion he thrust a well-munched core before her skeptical eyes.

"An' the cannin' factory buyin' this fruit at four dollars a bushel!" he went on, indignantly.

But the spirit of peace had already taken possession of Miss Arabella's soul.

"Well, what's an apple or two, anyway, Silas? I s'pose it's been that O'Malley kid, or some other young thief!"

A large ripe apple fell and went into a dozen pieces on the back of Miss Arabella's rocker.

"And it's time them Strawberry Reds were picked, anyway!" she announced, with decision.

She turned again to her "Family Guardian." The old Captain, finding his muttered thunderings elicited no response, settled himself back in his chair, and was soon sending forth sonorous and rhythmical snores. Miss Arabella now and then turned a page. Lonely began to itch, and scratched himself cautiously. It was hot and close up among the dense foliage, and his legs were getting stiff and cramped.

He wished he could get away and go in for a good swim. The hornets buzzed noisily about him ; one even settled on the calf of his leg, and in a sudden terror of fear he wondered if it would sting him ; and if so, could he keep from hollering.

It seemed to get hotter as time wore on. By stretching his neck carefully he could catch a glimpse of the limpid and cool-looking river water, ruffling and shimmering in the afternoon sunlight. He scratched himself once more, and even wished he could go to sleep. The blue flies buzzed ; the bees and hornets hummed, the leaves stirred lazily ; the relaxing little bare leg fell forward. A moment later Lonely was fast asleep up among Captain Steiner's Strawberry Reds.

His head drooped lower and lower ; his body sagged comfortably down in the wide tree-crotch. The old Captain wakened, removed his red bandanna, and was gazing dreamily and contentedly up into the gloomy and cool-looking shadows of the tree, when suddenly a boy's hat fell, as from an open sky, into his startled lap.

The old Captain examined that hat carefully ;

then he tiptoed cautiously over to Miss Arabella, who whispered back to the Captain, and shook her head in unison with him, and then hurried to the wood-shed for the garden-rake.

Mounting perilously on the edge of his chair, the old Captain pushed back the screening boughs, and revealed the unconscious form of the apple-thief, deep in his innocent dreams.

The old Captain chortled wickedly, and rubbed his hands together. He left Miss Arabella on guard, and hobbled houseward for a clothes-line.

"He-he, the young rapscallion! The pirootin' young womper — we 've got him! My cookie-pie, we 've got him now!" he chuckled, as he emerged with the hempen emblem of bondage. But about the sleeping boy the impending knot of bondage was never tied.

The old Captain was suddenly startled by the shrill and terrified voice of Miss Arabella. His first thought was that Lonely had made good his escape.

"Silas! Silas! Quick! On them logs, there — there, above the landing! It 's Pauline Augusta! Be careful, child! Oh, be careful!"

Miss Arabella was already hurrying toward

the river-bank. The strands of hemp rope dropped from the old Captain's fingers.

"Stand steady, child, stand steady! Be still!" screamed Miss Arabella. Her fifty years of life beside that quiet old river and its rafts had taught her a little of the darker history of its shimmering, glinting midsummer water, and of the treachery of the sullen logs that floated so lazily on its shadowy surface.

"Don't move, child! Don't move till I get the boat!" she cried again. And already one or two of the closer neighbors, wondering what could be the meaning of such outcries from the quiet old orchard home, were hurrying in through the high-posted gateway.

But Pauline Augusta, herself surprised at so much noise and half-afraid to advance or retreat along the narrow boom-timber on which she stood, decided, in her moment of new-born doubt, to make for dry land. The round logs lay crowded together, providing a path between her and the grassy bank. As a new sense of terror took hold of her, she stepped recklessly from the squared and solid boom-timber to the logs that lay nearest her.

Lonely, wakened suddenly out of an uneasy

sleep, in which he had dreamed his flying-machine was breaking down on a cruise half-way to the moon, dazedly parted the thick apple branches and glanced down toward the river.

He heard the child's sudden, sharp little cry; he saw the log tip and roll and spin. A second later Pauline Augusta had disappeared from sight.

A groan went up from the women, helpless with the horror of it all. The old Captain tremblingly flung off his alpaca coat, and was tugging resolutely at his waistcoat.

"No, no, brother!" Miss Arabella cried, clinging to him madly. "You 're too old, too old, — you must n't do it!"

The old Captain broke away from her.

"By gad, ma'm — "

But that was as far as he got, for a sudden crisp little splash fell on the ears of the frantic group. A darting shadow, crowned with an unkempt halo of russet brown, had sped down the sloping bank and cut arrow-like into the quiet water. It had seemed like the swoop and dip of a kingfisher.

The watching group waited, motionless,

speechless, as the arrow-like figure dove straight for the little line of bubbles that drifted out from under the lower end of the raft.

A moment later a hand appeared above the water, then a sandy head, then a face. It took one short breath, and with an adroit kick of the heels went down again. He had missed her.

The group on the bank gasped. After all, it would be too late. The seconds sped away; he had not found her.

Then a sudden sign of commotion disturbed the surface of the quiet river. Hands appeared, and two heads, scratching and clutching and fighting hands, and two threshing bodies, strangely tangled together.

"By gad, he 's got her!" shrilled the old Captain. The sound of a woman's hysterical wailing rose through the quiet orchard, weirdly, uncannily.

Inch by inch the boy was fighting his way toward the bank, all the while striving to keep that rolling head with the streaming and matted hair above the surface of the water.

"Git a barrel!" he panted, as his knee struck the oozy bottom.

A dozen hands were ready and waiting to help them out.

"Git a barrel!" ordered the boy again, before even his feet were on the grassy slope.

"Yes, sir," cried Miss Arabella, insanely, as she flew to the wood-shed and staggered weakly back with an empty apple-barrel. Two of the children had already been sent off for old Doctor Ridley.

Once, in Cowansburg, Lonely had witnessed and assisted in the time-honored and ancient method of resuscitation by barrel. And it was not until he had seen Pauline Augusta none too gently turned upside down, and well dipped and prodded, and then rolled in hot blankets and given a sip or two of cherry brandy, that he gave any thought to himself.

"Gee whittaker," he said, weakly, "I — I feel kind o' funny!" And with that he plumped down on the grass, helplessly, with his eyelids quivering, and his toes twitching spasmodically.

Whether or not Lonely was about to faint, history will never record. Whether or not it was the stern old face of Cap'n Steiner which brought back a rush of very recent memories

and caused that artful simulation of utter weariness, far be it from his present biographer to say.

But he was promptly given a generous, an almost too generous, drink of cherry brandy, and even before Pauline Augusta was carried off to bed in the quiet, cool house, his old-time self-content had returned to him. Yet he was glad to be let alone. He lay in the sun, steaming, alone and forgotten, dreamily watching the open sky and inwardly remarking what fine, warm-feeling stuff cherry brandy really was.

Half an hour later, Doctor Ridley came out of the quiet and muffled house, his faded old eyes unnaturally bright, his fingers meditatively feeling through the two capacious pockets hidden away under his black coat-tails. For once in his life that almost unfailing supply of horehound drops and peppermints, which had brought happiness to many a dozen children, was found to be exhausted. He had been hearing a thing or two about Lonely O'Malley. Again he felt fruitlessly in the depths of his pockets, looking short-sightedly about for the boy himself.

He suddenly stood transfixed, in his quest for his modest young hero, both puzzled and startled by the scene which met his eyes.

On the river-bank, outlined against the afternoon glare of the quiet water, stood Lonely and Cap'n Steiner, speechless, each vindictively eyeing the other.

The Captain's oak stick was in his upraised hand; his body shook with the stress of some strange emotion. This, the wondering Doctor took note, appeared to be one of rage when he confronted the glowering boy. Yet when his face was turned away, in the direction of the Doctor, it seemed one of sternly repressed hilarity.

"You — you young limb!" gasped the Captain, faintly, looking from Lonely to his tree of Strawberry Reds, and then back to the squinting and hunching Lonely once more.

"You rapscallion! You — you pirooting young varmint! I'm a-going to whale the hide off you!"

"Well, do it!" said Lonely, sulkily, looking as though he would be much relieved at such a procedure.

"Silas!" cried Miss Arabella from the side

door. "Silas! Don't you be hard on that poor child!"

"He-he! He-he! Hard on *him* — the worst young limb in all Chamboro! Why, whalin' 's too easy for him!"



EACH VINDICTIVELY EYEING THE OTHER

"I declare to goodness, Silas Steiner, you 're a worse old tyrant than I ever took you for! You leave off pesterin' that boy and let him come in and git some dry clothes and something good to eat!"

The Doctor walked slowly over and put his kindly old hand on Lonely's sandy, bedraggled, and very unhappy head.

"Lonely, I 'm proud of you!" was all he said. But it was enough. He looked down into the boy's rebellious and unfathomable eyes, still slightly unsteady from the effects of Miss Arabella's too potent cherry brandy. Then he looked out at the quiet river, and at the huddled logs and the spot over which had hovered so closely the wing of tragedy. "You 're not cut out for a hero, my boy, but you almost made one!" he repeated, solemnly.

Lonely grew even more uncomfortable. This being torn between the opposing forces of kindness and wrath was too much for him. He wished he could get away, and make tracks for the cave or the swimming-hole. Even the approach of Miss Arabella, with a glass of cider and a large slice of fruit-cake, did not alleviate his inward unrest.

"Proud of him! A hero! Why, dammit, sir," roared the old Captain, "d' you know that young limb has been a-stealin' my Strawberry Reds — the first young varmint to git at that fruit o' mine this thirteen year back — and under my very nose, sir!"

"Tut, tut!" said the old Doctor.

"I could have overlooked *that*! But when he comes a-struttin' up to me and *tells me*, cool as a cowcumber, that he 's been at 'em — the — then I 've just got to let out!"

"Fiddlesticks!" said the old Doctor.

"Yes, fiddlesticks!" repeated Miss Arabella. And she placed the cake and cider on the sundial, and stooped down over Lonely, unexpectedly putting her maiden arms hungrily about the sodden figure.

The boy himself looked about furtively, wondering if any of the women folks had seen it. The two old men walked slowly away, arm in arm, under the shadowy apple-trees. The Captain chuckled quietly, deep down in his throat.

"Why, Doc, I believe I would a-bawled— a-bawled like a demned baby, if I had n't a-gone for him that fashion!"

"Fiddlesticks!" said the old Doctor again.

Yet the two old cronies continued to pace up and down together, arm in arm, under the fruit-laden trees, looking after the sandy-headed boy as he was led away into the strange, shadowy house.

There Miss Arabella and the Widow Starbottle buzzed solicitously about him, imagining that his all too obvious unhappiness was something of the body, and not of the soul. Even Lionel Clarence's mother wanted to know if Lonely did not feel proud of himself, and asked him for the fourth time just how he did it, and patted him on the head, and said he was one of Nature's little noblemen.

"What t' ell 's all this rumpus about?" was the bewildered question which Nature's little nobleman was asking himself in vain.

Then a door that led into the darkened bedroom opened quietly, and Pauline Augusta's mother appeared on the threshold.

Lonely edged closer to Miss Arabella.

"Say, Mis' Steiner," he muttered, under his breath, guardedly, "*are we square 'bout those Strawberry Reds?*"

Miss Arabella had completely forgotten.

Yet she sighed a little as she looked into the shrewd, the guilty, and the altogether unhappy face of Lonely, — sighed as one might over a stain in a fine new gown, or at a cloud on the sky-line of a perfect day.

"Yes, of course, Lonely! Don't you see, you 're a *hero* now! And there 's Mrs. Persons hunting all round for you!"

Lonely looked relieved, and as the grateful mother of the girl he had dragged from under the raft came over to him, he batted his eyes solemnly, and tried to look wistful, and puffed out his chest with a new sense of dignity.

The pale-browed mother took the thin and sunburned face between her two trembling hands. Twice she essayed to speak and twice she failed, the quiet tears welling up to her eyes, and rolling unheeded down her cheeks. Then she deliberately bent over and kissed the worst young limb in all Chamboro, on his hot and perspiring young brow.

"My hero!" she murmured, inadequately.

Her arms were locked about the still sodden and shrinking little figure, to whom love was so alien and so unknown. He tried to writhe and twist away, but could not.

"Ah, Lonely, Lonely, how shall I ever pay you back for this?" asked the woman, sobbingly, with relaxing and sorrowful happiness.

Bitterly, heroically, Lonely fought and struggled against the implacable tide of emotion that seemed engulfing him. His lips quivered; a smarting tear-drop or two coursed down over a freckly pathway.

"What is it, dear?" asked the woman, bending over him.

"*I — I want to go swimmin'*," murmured Lonely, huskily, inadequately, but honestly.

And at this precise point, Master Lonely O'Malley, I must leave you at last, a hero, — hybrid of good and bad, as are all earth's heroes at heart. It may be only for your brief little day, but still I leave you, a hero. For to-morrow, I know, the eternal boy will reassert itself, the old blood will break out, the glory will be faded, the halo will be either sadly awry or altogether missing, the saint will be fallen from its snowy niche.

To-morrow, alas! you will be knee-deep in the old restless wickednesses, — yes, up to your generous young ears in all the old evils,

tripping and stumbling and falling with the same restless young feet over the same old inexorable temptations, a child of those wayward impulses and dreams which make you so sadly unsatisfying, so human, and, I dare say, so commonplace!

The Riverside Press
*Electrotyped and printed by H. O. Houghton & Co.
Cambridge, Mass., U. S. A.*